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POETRY & DRAMA

Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide,
In thy most need to go by thy side

HENRIK IBSEN, born at Skien, Norway, on 20th March 1828. Obtained work in connection with theatres in Bergen and Christiania. Left Norway in 1864 and lived abroad—mostly in Germany—returning to Norway in 1891. Died at Christiania on 23rd May 1906.

HENRIK IBSEN

PEER GYNT

TRANSLATED BY
R. FARQUHARSON SHARP

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INTRODUCTION

Peer Gynt was written in 1867, when Ibsen was nearly forty.[1] It followed his other great dramatic poem, *Brand*, by rather less than two years,—for *Brand*, though not published till 1866, was written in 1865. The contrast offered by the audacious high spirits of *Peer Gynt* to the austere gloom of *Brand* was a reflection of a welcome change in their author's worldly circumstances. Ibsen's growing independence of thought and his increasing frankness in insisting upon it (as he had done in his play *Love's Comedy*) had aroused a tempest of criticism in his own country, and in 1864 he had cast off the embarrassing trammels of national and family ties and had gone into voluntary exile in Italy. This had been rendered possible by a small grant of money that had been awarded him by the Norwegian government and substantially supplemented by the kindness of one or two friends. *Brand* was the first outcome of his detachment from real poverty. It to a great extent rehabilitated his repute at home, and put some money in his pocket; and this success further resulted in the Norwegian government's allotting him a "literary pension" of some ninety pounds a year. This sum, together with what he expected to make by his pen, opened out a prospect of a life of literary activity unhampered by continual anxiety as to his daily bread.

Peer Gynt obviously was written when his temperament was on the rebound and he was beginning to feel assurance that he could be as independent in thought and word as he pleased. It was conceived (as he says in a letter to Björnson) in the mood of a "Korstog-Jubel" —a "Crusader's Song of Triumph." "After *Brand* came *Peer Gynt*, as though of itself," he says in another

[1] Further details respecting Ibsen's life and writings will be found in the introductions to the five preceding volumes of Ibsen's plays in "Everyman's Library."

letter; [1] "it was written in Southern Italy, in the Island of Ischia and at Sorrento. So far away from one's future readers, one becomes reckless." Again, in a letter written some five years after *Peer Gynt* appeared, he says: "*Peer Gynt* is the very antithesis of *Brand*. . . . It is reckless and formless, written with no thought of the consequences—as I could only dare to write when far from my own country."

In 1880 Ibsen replied to one of his translators, who had asked for information as to the genesis of *Peer Gynt* in its author's brain: "to make the matter intelligible I should have to write a whole book, and for that the time has not yet come. Everything that I have written has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through, even if it has not been my own personal experience; in every new poem or play I have aimed at my own spiritual emancipation and purification." As a matter of fact one of the outstanding features of *Peer Gynt*—the character of Aase, Peer's mother, and the incidents woven round her—was, as we learn from Ibsen's letters, derived directly from his own experiences. "This poem," he wrote to his friend Hansen in 1870, "contains much that is reminiscent of my own youth; for Aase, my mother—with necessary exaggerations—served as model." Again, in a letter written to Brandes in 1882, he says: "My father was a merchant with a large business and wide connections, and he enjoyed dispensing reckless hospitality. In 1836 he failed, and nothing was left to us except a farm. . . . In writing *Peer Gynt* I had the circumstances and memories of my own childhood before me when I described the life in the house of 'the rich John Gynt.'"

With its obvious satire on the typical Norwegian temperament, as well as on what Ibsen considered a ridiculous aspiration for "national self-realisation," it is not surprising that *Peer Gynt* was not at first as popular in Norway as *Brand* had been. Seven editions of *Brand* had appeared before *Peer Gynt* reached its third. In 1876 Ibsen prepared an abridged version of *Peer Gynt* for representation at the Christiania theatre,

[1] I quote from Mary Morison's translation of Ibsen's Correspondence, published in 1905.

where it was performed with Grieg's incidental music; and by degrees it became a stock feature in the repertories of the chief Scandinavian theatres. The earliest German translation of the poem was published in 1881; the first English in 1892; and the first French in 1896. In Germany and in France performances have been given of abridged versions, and in 1906 Richard Mansfield produced an almost complete version at Chicago. In this country there has not yet been any attempt at a complete public performance, though a selection of scenes, translated by Miss I. M. Pagan, has been performed semi-privately.

Peer Gynt is (as Ibsen was emphatic in asserting) first and foremost a poetic fantasy, and only incidentally a satire. It is a fantasy woven out of the folklore of its author's country and embroidered by his wealth of thought and keen wit. There is a philosophy to be found in it, no doubt; but Ibsen did not set out to write a philosophical poem, but a fantasy. It contains many a shaft of satire, no doubt; but it was not primarily intended as a satirical poem, but as sheer fantasy. This cannot be too emphatically insisted upon, nor too diligently remembered in reading the poem. In a letter to his publisher, soon after *Peer Gynt* had made its appearance, Ibsen wrote: "I learn that the book has created great excitement in Norway. This does not trouble me in the least; but both there and in Denmark they have discovered much more satire in it than was intended by me. Why can they not read the book as a poem? For as such I wrote it. The satirical passages are pretty well isolated. But if the Norwegians of to-day recognise themselves, as it would appear they do, in the character of Peer Gynt, that is the good people's own affair."

Peer Gynt has been the prey of many commentators; and of the majority of them the question might well be asked: "Why can you not read it as a fantasy? For as such Ibsen wrote it." Ibsen himself ruefully complained more than once that his critics persisted in reading far more into his work than he had intentionally put there; and *Peer Gynt* has been a sufferer in this respect. The wise reader, approaching the poem for the

first time, will simply abandon himself or herself to the current of fancy—now laughing, now tender, now ironical—that sweeps through it; remembering that it is folklore, and the folklore of a people to whose peasantry Trolls and Witches are even to-day a reality. There are isolated difficulties to be encountered in the reading, no doubt; an attempt has been made to touch on some of them in footnotes to the present translation; but, in the main, if the poem be read with an appreciation of its origin and intention, and with a modicum of common sense, its fantasy need not unduly bewilder nor its philosophy unduly puzzle. Even caprice is permissible in a fantasy; Ibsen, on being asked if he corroborated a suggested explanation of a certain scene in *Peer Gynt*, replied that nothing had been farther from his thoughts than what his commentator suggested, and that he had as a matter of fact "stuck in the scene as a mere caprice."

In sending his publishers the manuscript of the poem, Ibsen wrote: "It may interest you to know that Peer Gynt was a real person, who lived in Gudbrandsdal, probably at the end of last, or the beginning of this, century. His name is still [1867] well known among the peasants there; but of his exploits not much more is known than is to be found in Asbjörnsen's *Norwegian Fairy Tales*. . . . Thus I have not had very much to build upon, but that has left me so much the more liberty." In Asbjörnsen's book Peer Gynt's chief exploits lie in the direction of fighting and conquering Trolls.

It is practically impossible for any translation of *Peer Gynt* to be entirely satisfactory. It must be in verse; a prose version of such a fantasy is unthinkable —even if it were not for the fact that its author declared that he would rather never see it translated than translated into prose. One of the charms of the diction of the original is the ingenious variation of metre for scenes of varying nature; that, translation may attempt to reproduce; but the ingenuity of its rhymes cannot be reproduced, and its verbal brilliance must be dulled, in translation.

The present translator has deliberately avoided two

shackling conditions which, it is permissible to think, have hampered previous translators of the poem; he has not attempted rhymed verse, and he has refused to be fettered by a superstitious regard for purely verbal literalness or for "line for line" rendering. He has made an attempt to follow the metres of the original, in unrhymed verse, keeping as closely to the original's literal meaning as was compatible with intelligibility in another tongue—his aim being to produce a version that might be read with sufficient ease to induce appreciation of this amazing work; and appreciation of *Peer Gynt* is bound to lead to admiration of it.

R. FARQUHARSON SHARP.

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THE CHARACTERS

Aase, widow of John Gynt, a peasant.
Peer Gynt, her son.
Two Old Women with corn-sacks.
Aslak, a blacksmith.
Wedding Guests, a Steward at the Wedding, a Fiddler, etc.
A Stranger and his Wife.
Solveig and little Helga, their daughters.
The Owner of Hægstad Farm.
Ingrid, his daughter.
The Bridegroom and his parents.
Three Cowherd Girls. A Woman in Green.
The Troll King. Several Trolls of his Court.
Troll Boys and Girls. Two Witches. Hobgoblins, Brownies, Elves, etc.
An Ugly Urchin. A Voice in the Gloom. Birds' Cries.
Kari, a cotter's wife.
Mr. Cotton, Monsieur Ballon, Herr von Eberkopf and Herr Trumpeterstraale, tourists.
A Thief and a Receiver of Stolen Goods.
Anitra, daughter of a Bedouin Chief.
Arabs, Female Slaves, Dancing Girls, etc.
The Statue of Memnon (with song). The Sphinx at Gizeh (dumb).
Professor Begriffenfeldt, Ph.D., in charge of the Lunatic Asylum at Cairo.
Lunatics with their Keepers.
Huhu, a language-reformer from the Malabar coast.
Hussein, an Eastern Secretary of State.
A Fellah, carrying a royal mummy.
A Norwegian Skipper and his Crew. A Strange Passenger.
A Priest. A Funeral Party. A Button-Moulder. A Thin Man.

(*The action, which begins in the early years of the century and ends somewhere about our own day* [1867], *takes place partly in the Gudbrandsdal and on the surrounding mountain-tops, partly on the coast of Morocco, in the Sahara Desert, in the Cairo Lunatic Asylum, at Sea, etc.*)

PEER GYNT

ACT I

SCENE I

(SCENE.—*The wooded mountain-side near* AASE'S *farm, with a stream rushing past. On the farther bank stands an old mill. It is a hot summer's day.* PEER GYNT, *a sturdy youth of twenty, comes down the path, followed by his mother* AASE, *who is short and slight. She is scolding him angrily.*)

AASE.

Peer, you're lying!

PEER GYNT (*without stopping*).

No, I'm not!

AASE.

Well then, will you swear it's true?

PEER GYNT.

Swear? Why should I?

AASE.

Ah, you daren't!
Your whole tale's a pack of lies!

PEER GYNT.

Every blessed word is true.

AASE (*facing him*).

I wonder you can face your mother!
First of all, just when the work
Is at busiest, off you go
To prowl about the hills for weeks
After reindeer in the snow;
Come back with your clothes in rags,
Game-bag empty—and no gun!
Then you have the cheek to think
You can make your mother swallow
Such a pack of lies as this
About your hunting!—Tell me, then,
Where you found this precious buck?

PEER GYNT.

West of Gendin.

AASE (*with a scornful laugh*).

I dare say!

PEER GYNT.

I was leeward of the blast,
And behind a clump of trees
He was scraping in the snow
For some moss——

AASE (*as before*).

Oh yes, no doubt!

PEER GYNT.

I stood and listened, held my breath,
Heard the scraping of his hoof,
Saw the antlers of his horns;
Then upon my belly crawled
Carefully between the rocks;
Peeped from cover of the stones—
Such a buck, so sleek and fat,
I suppose was never seen!

AASE.

I expect not!

PEER GYNT.

Then I fired!
Down the buck came on the ground!
But the moment he had fallen
I was up astride his back,
On his left ear got my grip,
And was just in act of thrusting
With my knife into his gullet
Just behind his head—when, hi!
With a scream the ugly beggar
Scrambled up upon his feet.
From my hand his sudden back-throw
Jerked my hunting-knife and scabbard,
Pinned me to his loins and held me
By the legs between his antlers
Like a pair of mighty pincers;
Then he rushed with bounds gigantic
Right along the ridge of Gendin!

AASE (*involuntarily*).

Christ in Heaven—!

PEER GYNT.

Have you ever
Been upon the ridge of Gendin?
Fully half a mile it stretches,
At the top as sheer and narrow
As a scythe-blade. Looking downward—
Past the slopes and past the glaciers,
Past the grey ravines and gullies—
Either side you see the water
Wrapped in dark and gloomy slumber
Half a mile at least beneath you.
Right along it he and I
Clove our passage through the air.
Never rode I such a steed!

Far ahead the peaks were sparkling
As we rushed along. Beneath us
In the void the dusky eagles
Fell away like motes in sunshine;
You could see the ice-floes breaking
On the banks, yet hear no murmur.
But the sprites that turn us dizzy
Danced and sang and circled round us—
I could hear and seemed to see them!

AASE (*swaying as if giddy*).

Heaven help us!

PEER GYNT.

On a sudden,
On the precipice's edge,
From the hole where it lay hidden
Almost at the reindeer's feet,
Up a ptarmigan rose, cackling,
Flapping with its wings in terror.
Then the reindeer, madly swerving,
Gave a bound sky-high that sent us
Plunging o'er the edge and downwards.
[AASE *totters and grasps a tree-trunk.* PEER GYNT *continues.*
Gloomy precipice behind us!—
Fathomless abyss below us!
First through clouds of mist we hurtled,
Then a flock of gulls we scattered
Wheeling through the air and screaming.
Downward still and ever downwards!
But beneath us something glistened
Whitish, like a reindeer's belly.
Mother, 'twas our own reflection
Mirrored in the lake beneath us,
Rushing up, it seemed, to meet us
Just as swiftly and as madly
As we downwards rushed towards it.

AASE (*gasping for breath*).

Peer! God help me—! Tell me quickly!

PEER GYNT.

Buck from air and buck from water
Met with mighty splash together,
Scattering the foam around us.
Then at last we somehow managed
To the northern shore to struggle;
Buck, he swam and dragged me after—
So I got home——

AASE.

But where's the reindeer?

PEER GYNT.

I expect he's where I left him—
[*Snaps his fingers, turns on his heel and adds:*
If you find him, you may keep him!

AASE.

And your neck you haven't broken?
Nor your legs? Nor smashed your backbone?
Praise and thanks to God be given
For His goodness that has saved you!
There's a rent across your breeches,
It is true; but that is scarcely
Worth a mention when one thinks
What the harm might well have been
From a leap like that of yours——
[*She suddenly pauses, stares at him with open mouth, seems to struggle for speech and at last breaks out.*
Oh, you lying little devil!—
Christ above us, what a liar!
All that rigmarole you told me
Is the tale of Gudbrand Glesnë[1]

[1] The tale is told in Asbjörnsen's *Norske Huldre-Eventyr*, from another tale in which collection Ibsen derived the germ of his "Peer Gynt" idea.

That I heard when I was twenty.
'Twas to him that all this happened,
Not to you, you——

PEER GYNT.

Yes, it did;
History repeats itself.

AASE.

Lies, I know, can be so furbished
And disguised in gorgeous wrappings
That their skinny carcasses
Not a soul would recognize.
That's what you've been doing now,
With your wonderful adventures—
Eagles' wings, and all that nonsense—
Making up a pack of lies,
Tales of breathless risk and danger,
Till one can no longer tell
What one knows and what one doesn't.

PEER GYNT.

If a man said that to me,
I would beat him to a jelly.

AASE (*in tears*).

Would to God that I were dead
And buried in the cold black earth!
Prayers and tears have no effect.
You're a hopeless ne'er-do-well!

PEER GYNT.

Dearest pretty little mother,
Every word you say is true;
So be gay and happy——

AASE.

Pshaw!
Don't talk nonsense. How could I

Be happy, if I wanted to,
With such a pig as you for son?
Don't you think it's pretty hard
For a poor weak widow never
To feel anything but shame? [*Weeps again.*
How much is there left of all
That your grandfather enjoyed
In his days of comfort? Where
Are the well-filled money-bags
Left by good old Rasmus Gynt?
'Twas your father emptied them,
Pouring money out like sand—
Buying land in all directions—
Gilded coach to ride about in.
Where's the stuff so freely wasted
At the famous winter banquet,
When each guest sent glass and bottle
Crash against the wall behind him?

PEER GYNT.

Where are the snows of yester year?

AASE.

Hold your tongue when I am speaking!
See the farmhouse—scarce a window
But is smashed and stuffed with dish-clout;
Scarce a hedge or fence is standing;
No protection for the cattle
From the wind and wet; the meadows
And the fields all lying fallow;
Every month distraint on something——

PEER GYNT.

That's enough of dismal wailing!
Often when our luck's been drooping
It has grown as strong as ever.

AASE.

Where it grew, the soil is poisoned.
Peer, you certainly don't lack

Good opinion of yourself.
You are just as brisk and bumptious,
Just as pert, as when the Parson
Who had come from Copenhagen
Asked you what your Christian name was,
Telling you that where he came from
Lots of men of highest station
Would be glad to be as clever;
And your father was so grateful
For his amiable praises
That a horse and sledge he gave him.
Ah me! All went well in those days.
Parsons, Captains and such people,
Dropping in to see us daily—
Filling up with drink and victuals
Until they were nearly bursting.
But it's when your fortunes alter
That you get to know your neighbours.
Since the day when " rich John Gynt "
Took the road with pedlar's pack,
Not a soul has e'er been near us.
[*Wipes her eyes with her apron.*
You're a stout and strapping fellow—
You should be a staff supporting
Your old mother in her troubles.
You should work the farm for profit,
And look after all the little
That your father left behind him. [*Weeps again.*
Heaven knows, it's precious little
Use you've been to me, you rascal.
When you are at home, you're loafing
By the fire, or grubbing idly
In the ashes and the embers;
When you're in the town you frighten
All the girls you meet at dances,
So that I'm ashamed to own you—
Fighting with the lowest tramps——

PEER GYNT (*moving away from her*).
Let me be!

AASE (*following him*).

Can you deny
You were foremost in the brawling
In that dog-fight of a scrimmage
Down at Lundë? Who but you
Cracked the blacksmith Aslak's arm?
Or at any rate disjointed
One of his ten fingers for him?

PEER GYNT.

Who has stuffed you up with that?

AASE (*hotly*).

Why, the cotters heard his howls!

PEER GYNT (*rubbing his elbow*).

Yes—but it was I that howled.

AASE.

What!

PEER GYNT.

Yes, mother, *I* got thrashed.

AASE.

What!

PEER GYNT.

Well, he's a lusty chap.

AASE.

Who is?

PEER GYNT.

Aslak—as I felt!

AASE.

Shame! I'd like to spit upon you!
To let such a scurvy swiller,
Such a worthless drunken rascal,

Beat you! [*Weeps again.*
Often I've endured
Shame and scorn on your account,
But that this disgrace should happen
Is the very worst of all.
If he *is* a lusty fellow,
Need that mean that you're a weakling?

PEER GYNT (*with a laugh*).

Well, it doesn't seem to matter
If I beat, or if I'm beaten—
Either way you start your wailing.
You may cheer up——

AASE.

Are you lying
Now again?

PEER GYNT.

Yes, just this once;
So you may as well stop crying.
[*Clenches his left hand.*
See, 'twas with this pair of pincers
That I bent the blacksmith double,
While my right hand was my hammer——

AASE.

Oh, you brawler! You will bring me
To my grave by your behaviour!

PEER GYNT.

Nonsense! You're worth something better—
Better twenty thousand times!
Little, homely, dainty mother,
Just believe what I am saying.
All the town shall do you honour;
Only wait till I have done
Something—something really great!

AASE (*contemptuously*).

You!

PEER GYNT.

Who knows what lies before him!

AASE.

If you ever know enough
To mend your breeches when they're torn,
'Tis the most that I could hope for!

PEER GYNT (*hotly*).

I'll be a King, an Emperor!

AASE.

Oh, God help me! Now he's losing
What was left him of his wits!

PEER GYNT.

Yes, I shall! Just give me time!

AASE.

Of course! As the old proverb runs,
Everything comes to him that waits.

PEER GYNT.

Mother, you shall see.

AASE.

Be quiet!
You are as mad as mad can be.
After all, it's true enough
Something might have come of you
If you'd thought of something else
But your stupid lies and nonsense.
Hægstad's daughter fancied you,
And you might have won the game
If you'd rightly gone to work——

PEER GYNT.

Do you think so?

AASE.

The old man
Is too weak to stand against her.
He is obstinate enough
In a way; but in the end
It is Ingrid takes the lead,
And where *she* goes, step by step
The old hunks comes stumbling after.
[*Begins to cry again.*
Ah, Peer—a richly dowered girl,
Heir to his lands, just think of it.
You might, if only you had liked,
In bridegroom's finery be dressed
Instead of in these dirty rags!

PEER GYNT (*quickly*).

Come on, I'll be a suitor now.

AASE.

Where?

PEER GYNT.

Why, at Hægstad!

AASE.

Ah, poor boy,
The right of way is barred to you.

PEER GYNT.

What do you mean?

AASE.

Alas, alas!
You've lost the moment—lost your chance—

PEER GYNT.

How's that?

AASE (*sobbing*).

While you were on the hills,
Riding your reindeer through the air,
Mads Moen went and won the girl.

PEER GYNT.

What? He? That guy the girls all laugh at?

AASE.

Yes. Now she's betrothed to him.

PEER GYNT.

Just wait till I have harnessed up
The cart—— [*Turns to go.*

AASE.

You needn't take the trouble.
The wedding is to-morrow.

PEER GYNT.

Pooh!
I'll get there by this evening.

AASE.

Fie! Do you want to make things worse?
Just think how everyone will mock us!

PEER GYNT.

Cheer up! All will turn out right.
[*Shouting and laughing at the same time.*
No, mother! We won't take the cart;
We haven't time to put the mare in.
[*Lifts her off her feet.*

AASE.

Let me alone!

PEER GYNT.

No, in my arms
You shall be carried to the wedding!
[*Wades out into the water.*

AASE.

Help! Help! Oh, Heaven protect me!—Peer,
We'll drown——

PEER GYNT.

Oh no, we shan't—I'm born
To meet a better death.

AASE.

That's true;
You'll probably be hanged. [*Pulls his hair.*
You beast!

PEER GYNT.

You'd best keep quiet, for just here
The bottom's smooth and slippery.

AASE.

Ass!

PEER GYNT.

Yes, abuse me if you like,
Words don't do any harm. Aha!
The bottom's sloping upwards now——

AASE.

Don't lose your hold of me!

PEER GYNT.

Gee up!
We'll play at Peer and Reindeer now! [*Prances.*
I am the reindeer, you are Peer!

AASE.

I'm sure I don't know what I am!

PEER GYNT.

See here, now—here's an even bottom.
[*Wades to the bank.*
Now give your steed a pretty kiss
To thank him for the ride you've had.

AASE (*boxing his ears*).

That's the thanks I'll give him!

PEER GYNT.

Wow!
That's a scurvy sort of tip.

AASE.

Put me down!

PEER GYNT.

Not till we get
To where the wedding is afoot.
You are so clever, you must be
My spokesman—talk to the old fool—
Tell him Mads Moen is a sot——

AASE.

Put me down!

PEER GYNT.

And tell him, too,
The sort of lad that Peer Gynt is.

AASE.

Yes, you may take your oath I will!
A pretty character I'll give you!
I'll draw a faithful portrait, too,—

And all your devil's pranks and antics
I'll tell them of—in every detail——

PEER GYNT.

Oh, will you!

AASE (*kicking him in her temper*).

I won't hold my tongue
Till the old man sets his dog
Upon you, as upon a tramp!

PEER GYNT.

Ah, then I think I'll go alone.

AASE.

All right, but I shall follow you!

PEER GYNT.

Dear mother, you're not strong enough.

AASE.

Not strong enough? I'm so worked up
That I could smash a heap of stones!
Oh, I could make a meal of flints!
So put me down!

PEER GYNT.

Yes, if you promise——

AASE.

Nothing! I'm going there with you,
And they shall know the sort you are!

PEER GYNT.

Oh no, you won't; you'll stay behind.

AASE.

Never! I'm going there with you.

PEER GYNT.

Oh no, you aren't.

AASE.

What will you do?

PEER GYNT.

I'll put you on the mill-house roof!
[*Puts her up there. She screams.*

AASE.

Lift me down!

PEER GYNT.

If you will listen——

AASE.

Bah!

PEER GYNT.

Now, little mother, listen——

AASE (*throwing a bit of turf thatch at him*).

Lift me down this moment, Peer!

PEER GYNT.

If I dared I would, indeed. [*Goes nearer to her.*
Remember to sit still and quiet—
Not to kick your legs about,
Nor the tiles to break or loosen—
Or an accident may happen,
And you might fall off.

AASE.

You beast!

PEER GYNT.

Don't shift!

AASE.

I wish you'd been shifted
Up the chimney, like a changeling![1]

PEER GYNT.

Mother! Shame!

AASE.

Pooh!

PEER GYNT.

You should rather
Give your blessing on my journey.
Will you?

AASE.

I'll give you a thrashing,
Big as you are!

PEER GYNT.

Oh well, good-bye!
Only have patience, mother dear;
I shan't be long.
[*Is going; but turns, lifts a warning finger, and says:*
But don't forget
You mustn't try to move from there! [*Goes.*

AASE.

Peer!—Heaven help me, he is gone!
Reindeer-rider! Liar! Hi!
Will you listen?—No, he's off
Over the meadows. [*Screams.*
Help! I'm giddy!
[*Two* OLD WOMEN, *with sacks on their backs, come down the path towards the mill.*

[1] She alludes to a Norwegian superstition that "change lings" left by the fairies can be blown up the chimney.

FIRST OLD WOMAN.
Who's that screaming?

AASE.
Me!

SECOND OLD WOMAN.
Why, Aase,
You have had a lift in life!

AASE.
One that won't do me much good—
I'll be booked for heaven directly!

FIRST OLD WOMAN.
Pleasant journey!

AASE.
Fetch a ladder!
Get me down! That devil Peer——

SECOND OLD WOMAN.
What, your son?

AASE.
Now you can say
You have seen how he behaves.

FIRST OLD WOMAN.
We'll bear witness.

AASE.
Only help me—
Help me to get straight to Hægstad——

SECOND OLD WOMAN.
Is he there?

FIRST OLD WOMAN.

You'll be revenged;
The blacksmith's going to the party.

AASE (*wringing her hands*).

Oh, God help me! My poor boy!
They will murder him between them!

FIRST OLD WOMAN.

Ah, we know that lot quite well;
You may bet that's what will happen!

SECOND OLD WOMAN.

You can see she's lost her senses.
[*Calls up the hill.*
Eivind! Anders! Hi! come here!

A MAN'S VOICE.

What?

SECOND OLD WOMAN.

Peer Gynt has put his mother
Up upon the mill-house roof!

SCENE II

(SCENE.—*A little hill covered with bushes and heather. The high-road, shut off by a fence, runs at the back.* PEER GYNT *comes down a foot-path, goes quickly up to the fence, and stands looking out over the landscape beyond.*)

PEER GYNT.

Yonder lies Hægstad. I shall soon be at it.
[*Climbs half over the fence, then stops and considers.*
I wonder if Ingrid's sitting all alone there?
[*Shades his eyes and looks along the road.*
No. Folk with gifts are swarming up like midges.
Perhaps I had better turn and go no farther.
[*Draws his leg back over the fence.*

There'll be their grins behind my back for certain—
Whispers that seem to burn their way right through you.

[*Moves a few steps away from the fence, and begins absently plucking leaves.*

If only I'd a good strong drink inside me—
Or could just slip into the house unnoticed—
Or if no one knew me—. No, some good strong liquor
Would be best; their laughter wouldn't hurt then.

[*Looks round suddenly as if startled, then hides among the bushes. Some* COUNTRY FOLK, *carrying presents, pass along the road on their way to the wedding.*

A MAN (*in conversation*).

With a drunkard for father, and a poor thing of a mother——

A WOMAN.

Yes, it's no wonder the boy is such a wastrel.

[*They pass on. After a little,* PEER GYNT *comes forward, blushing with shame, and peeps after them.*

PEER GYNT (*softly*).

Was it of me they gossiped? [*With a forced shrug.*
Oh well, let them!
Anyway they can't kill me with their gossip.

[*Throws himself down on the heather slope, and for some time lies on his back with his hands under his head, staring up into the sky.*

What a curious cloud! That bit's like a horse,
And there is its rider and saddle and bridle,
And behind them an old crone is riding a broomstick.
[*Laughs quietly to himself.*
That's mother! She's scolding and screaming "You beast!
Hi! Peer, come back!" [*Gradually closes his eyes.*
Yes, now she is frightened.—

There rides Peer Gynt at the head of his henchmen,
His charger gold-shod, silver-crested his harness.
Peer carries gauntlets and sabre and scabbard,
Wears a long coat with a fine silky lining.
Splendid the men in his retinue following;
But there's not one sits his charger as proudly,
Not one that glitters like him in the sunshine.
The people in groups by the wayside are gathered,
Lifting their hats as they stare up in wonder;
The women are curtseying, everyone knows it is
Kaiser Peer Gynt and his thousand retainers.
Half-guinea pieces and glittering shillings
Are strewn on the roadway as if they were pebbles;
Rich as a lord is each man in the parish.
Peer Gynt rides over the seas in his glory;
Engelland's Prince on the shore is awaiting,
And Engelland's maidens all ready to welcome him.
Engelland's nobles and Engelland's Kaiser
Rise from their seats as he deigns to approach them.
Lifting his crown, speaks the Kaiser in welcome——

ASLAK THE SMITH
(*to some others, as they pass by on the other side of the fence*).

Hullo! Look here! Why, it's Peer Gynt the drunkard!

PEER GYNT (*half rising*).

What, Kaiser—!

ASLAK (*leaning on the fence and grinning*).

Get up on your feet, my young fellow!

PEER GYNT.

What the devil—? The blacksmith! Well, pray, what do *you* want?

ASLAK (*to the others*).

He hasn't got over our spree down at Lundë.

PEER GYNT (*springing up*).
Just let me alone!

ASLAK.
That I will. But, young fellow,
What have you done with yourself since we parted?
It's six weeks ago. Have the troll-folk been at you?

PEER GYNT.
I can tell you I've done something wonderful, Aslak.

ASLAK (*winking to the others*).
Let's hear it then, Peer!

PEER GYNT.
No, it won't interest you.

ASLAK.
Shall we see you at Hægstad?

PEER GYNT.
You won't.

ASLAK.
Why, the gossip
Says there was a time you were fancied by Ingrid.

PEER GYNT.
You dirty-faced crow!

ASLAK.
Now don't get in a temper!
If the girl *has* refused you, there surely are others.
Remember the goodly John Gynt was your father!
Come along to the farm! There'll be girls at the wedding
As tender as lambkins, and widows well seasoned—

PEER GYNT.

Go to hell!

ASLAK.

You'll be sure to find someone who'll have you.
Good evening. I'll give the bride all your good wishes!

[*They go off, laughing and whispering.* PEER *stands for a moment looking after them, then tosses his head and turns half round.*

PEER GYNT.

Well, Ingrid at Hægstad may wed whom she pleases,
For all that I care! I shall be just as happy!
[*Looks down at his clothes.*
Breeches all torn—all dirty and tattered.
If only I had something new to put on me—
[*Stamps his foot on the slope.*
If I only could carve at their breasts like a butcher,
And tear out the scorn and contempt that they show me! [*Looks round suddenly.*
What was that? Who is it that's laughing behind there?
I certainly thought that I heard—. No, there's no one.
I'll go home to mother.

[*Moves off, but stops again and listens in the direction of Hægstad.*
The dance is beginning!

[*Stares and listens; moves step by step towards the fence; his eyes glisten; he rubs his hands down his legs.*

How the girls swarm! Seven or eight of them
There for each man! Oh, death and damnation,
I must go to the party!—But what about mother,
Sitting up there on the roof of the mill-house—?

[*His eyes wander towards the fence again; he skips and laughs.*

Haha! I can hear them out dancing a Halling![1]
Guttorm's the boy!—how he handles his fiddle!

[1] A boisterous country-dance.

Hear it sparkle and flash like a stream at a waterfall!
And think of the girls—all the pick of the neighbourhood—
Yes, death and damnation, I'm off to the party!
[*Vaults over the fence and goes off down the road.*

Scene III

(Scene.—*The courtyard of the farm at Hægstad. The farm buildings are at the back. A number of guests are assembled, and a lively dance is in progress on the grass. The* Fiddler *is seated on a table. The* Steward *stands in the doorway. Cook-maids pass to and fro between the buildings. The older folk are sitting about, gossiping.*)

A Woman
(*joining a group of guests who are sitting on some logs*).

The bride? To be sure she is crying a little,
But that's not a thing that is out of the usual.

The Steward (*to another group*).

Now then, my friends, you must empty your noggins!

A Man.

Ah, thank you kindly—you fill up too quickly!

A Youth
(*as he flies past the* Fiddler, *holding a girl by the hand*).

That's the way, Guttorm! Don't spare your fiddle-strings!

The Girl.

Scrape till it echoes out over the meadows!

Other Girls
(*standing in a ring round a youth who is dancing*).

That's a good step!

A Girl.

He's lusty and nimble!

The Youth (*dancing*).

The roof here is high and the walls far apart, you know![1]

[*The* Bridegroom *comes up whimpering to his* Father, *who is standing talking to some others, and pulls at his jacket.*

The Bridegroom.

Father, she won't! She is not being nice to me!

His Father.

What won't she do?

The Bridegroom.

She has locked herself in.

His Father.

Well, you must see if you can't find the key.

The Bridegroom.

But I don't know how.

His Father.

Oh, you are a nuisance!

[*Turns to the others again. The* Bridegroom *drifts across the courtyard.*

A Boy (*coming from behind the house*).

I say, you girls! Now things will be livelier! Peer Gynt's arrived!

[1] His allusion is to the fact that in dancing the Halling a great feat is to kick as high as the rafters of the roof; but he is dancing in the open air.

ASLAK (*who has just come on the scene*).
Who invited him?

THE STEWARD.
No one did.
[*Goes into the house.*

ASLAK (*to the girls*).
If he should speak to you, don't seem to hear him.

A GIRL (*to the others*).
No, we'll pretend that we don't even see him.
[PEER GYNT *comes in, hot and eager, stops in front of the group and rubs his hands.*

PEER GYNT.
Who is the nimblest girl of the lot of you?

A GIRL (*whom he has approached*).
Not I.

ANOTHER.
Nor I.

A THIRD.
No, nor I either.

PEER GYNT (*to a fourth*).
Then *you* dance with me, for want of a better.

THE GIRL (*turning away*).
I haven't time.

PEER GYNT (*to a fifth*).
You, then.

THE GIRL (*moving away*).
I'm off homeward.

PEER GYNT.

Homeward to-night? Are you out of your senses?

ASLAK (*after a little, in a low voice*).

Peer, she has taken an old man to dance with.

PEER GYNT (*turning quickly to another man*).

Where are the disengaged girls?

THE MAN.

Go and look for them.

[*He moves away from* PEER GYNT, *who has suddenly become subdued. He glances furtively and shyly at the group. They all look at him, but no one speaks. He approaches other groups. Wherever he goes there is a sudden silence; when he moves away, they smile and look after him.*

PEER GYNT (*in a low voice*).

Glances—and thoughts and smiles that are cutting—
Jarring on one like a file on a saw-blade!

[*He sidles along by the palings.* SOLVEIG, *holding little* HELGA *by the hand, comes into the courtyard with her* PARENTS.

A MAN (*to another, close to* PEER GYNT).

These are the newcomers.

THE OTHER.

Living out westward?

FIRST MAN.

Yes, out at Hedal.

THE OTHER.

Ah, yes—of course they are.

[PEER GYNT *advances to meet the newcomers, points to* SOLVEIG *and addresses her* FATHER.

PEER GYNT.

May I dance with your daughter?

THE FATHER.

You may; but before that
We must go indoors and give our hosts greeting.

[*They go in.*

THE STEWARD

(*to* PEER GYNT, *offering him a drink*).

As you're here, I suppose you must wet your whistle.

PEER GYNT (*looking fixedly after the newcomers*).

Thanks, I'm for dancing. I don't feel thirsty.

[*The* STEWARD *leaves him.* PEER GYNT *looks towards the house and laughs.*

How fair she is! Was there ever a fairer?
Eyes glancing down at her shoes and white apron—
And the way she held on to her mother's skirt, too—
And carried her prayer-book wrapped in a kerchief—!
I must have a look at her!

[*Is going into the house, but is met by several* YOUTHS *coming out.*

A YOUTH.

What, off already
Away from the dance?

PEER GYNT.

No.

THE YOUTH.

You're on the wrong road, then!

[*Takes him by the shoulders to turn him round.*

PEER GYNT.

Let me get past!

THE YOUTH.

Are you frightened of Aslak?

PEER GYNT.

I, frightened?

THE YOUTH.

Remember what happened at Lundë!

[*The group laugh and move off to where the dancing is going on.* SOLVEIG *comes to the door.*

SOLVEIG.

Are you the boy who wanted to dance with me?

PEER GYNT.

Of course I am. Can't you tell by the look of me? Come on!

SOLVEIG.

But I mustn't go far—mother said so.

PEER GYNT.

Mother said? Mother said? Were you only born yesterday?

SOLVEIG.

Don't laugh——

PEER GYNT.

It is true you are almost a kiddie still. Are you grown up?

SOLVEIG.

I shall soon be confirmed, you know.

PEER GYNT.

Tell me your name—then we can talk easier.

SOLVEIG.

My name is Solveig. Tell me what yours is.

PEER GYNT.

Peer Gynt.

SOLVEIG (*drawing back her hand from his*).

Oh, heavens!

PEER GYNT.

Why, what is the matter?

SOLVEIG.

My garter's come loose; I must tie it more carefully.
[*Leaves him.*

THE BRIDEGROOM (*pulling at his* MOTHER'S *sleeve*).

Mother, she won't——

HIS MOTHER.

She won't? What won't she do?

THE BRIDEGROOM.

Mother, she won't——

HIS MOTHER.

What?

THE BRIDEGROOM.

Unbar the door to me!

HIS FATHER (*in a low and angry voice*).

You're only fit to be tied in a stable, sir!

HIS MOTHER.

Poor boy, don't scold him—he'll be all right presently.

[*A* YOUTH *comes in, with a crowd of others who have been dancing.*

THE YOUTH.

Brandy, Peer?

PEER GYNT.

No.

YOUTH.

Just a drop!

PEER GYNT.

Have you got any?

YOUTH.

Maybe I have. [*Pulls out a flask and drinks.*

Ah, that's got a bite to it!

Well?

PEER GYNT.

Let me try it. [*Drinks.*

SECOND YOUTH.

And now have a pull at mine!

PEER GYNT.

No.

YOUTH.

Oh, what rubbish! Don't be a simpleton!
Have a drink, Peer!

PEER GYNT.

Well, give me a drop of it.
[*Drinks again.*

A GIRL (*in an undertone*).

Come, let's be off.

PEER GYNT.

Why, are you afraid of me?

YOUTH.

Do you think there is any that isn't afraid of you?
You showed us what you could do, down at Lundë.

PEER GYNT.

I can do better than that if I'm roused, you know!

YOUTH (*whispering*).

Now he is getting on!

OTHERS (*making a ring round* PEER).

Come on, now—tell us, Peer,
What can you do?

PEER GYNT.

Oh, I'll tell you to-morrow—

OTHERS.

No!
Tell us to-night!

A GIRL.

Can you show us some witchcraft, Peer?

PEER GYNT.

Ah, I can conjure the Devil!

A MAN.

My grandmother,
She could do that long before I was born, they say.

PEER GYNT.

Liar! What *I* can do, no one alive can do.
Why, once I conjured him into a nutshell,
Right through a worm-hole!

OTHERS (*laughing*).

Of course—we can guess that!

PEER GYNT.

He swore and he wept and promised to give me
All sorts of good things——

ONE OF THE GROUP.

But had to go into it?

PEER GYNT.

Yes; and then, when I'd stopped up the worm-hole,
Lord! if you'd heard him buzzing and rumbling!

A GIRL.

Fancy!

PEER GYNT.

'Twas like a great bumble-bee buzzing.

THE GIRL.

And pray have you got him still in the nutshell?

PEER GYNT.

No, the old Devil got right clean away again.
It is his fault the blacksmith dislikes me.

A BOY.

How's that?

PEER GYNT.

Because I took him to the smithy
And asked the smith to crack the nutshell for me.
He said he would. I laid it on the anvil;
But you know Aslak's very heavy-handed,
And with a will he laid on with his hammer——

A VOICE FROM THE GROUP.

Did he kill the Devil?

PEER GYNT.

No; he laid on stoutly,
But the Devil looked after himself and just vanished
Through ceiling and walls in a flame of fire.

SEVERAL VOICES.

And Aslak—?

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PEER GYNT.

Stood there with his hands well roasted.
And since that day we have never been friendly.
[*General laughter.*

VOICES.

That's a fine rigmarole!

OTHERS.

Easily his best one!

PEER GYNT.

Do you suggest that I made it up?

A MAN.

Oh no,
I know you didn't; for I've heard the story
Told by my grandfather——

PEER GYNT.

Liar! It happened
To me, I tell you!

THE MAN.

Oh, well—that's all right.

PEER GYNT (*tossing his head*).

Pooh! I can ride through the clouds on horseback!
There are lots of fine things I can do, I tell you!
[*Roars of laughter again.*

ONE OF THE GROUP.

Peer, let us see you ride clouds!

OTHERS.

Yes, dear Peer—!

PEER GYNT.

Oh, you won't need to beg me so humbly—
One day I'll ride like a storm o'er the lot of you!
The whole countryside shall fall at my feet!

AN OLDER MAN.

Why, now he's raving!

ANOTHER.

Yes, the great booby!

A THIRD.

The braggart!

A FOURTH.

The liar!

PEER GYNT (*threatening them*).

Just wait and you'll see, then!

A MAN (*half drunk*).

Yes, wait and you'll get your jacket well dusted!

OTHERS.

A good sound drubbing! A nice black eye, too!

[*The crowd disperses, the older ones angry and the younger ones laughing and mocking him.*

THE BRIDEGROOM (*edging up to* PEER).

Peer, is it true you can ride through the clouds, then?

PEER GYNT (*shortly*).

Anything, Mads! I'm the boy, I can tell you!

THE BRIDEGROOM.

I suppose you've a coat that will make you invisible?

PEER GYNT.

An invisible hat, do you mean? Yes, I have one.
[*Turns away from him.* SOLVEIG *comes across the courtyard leading* HELGA *by the hand.* PEER GYNT *goes to meet them, looking happier.*
Solveig! Ah, I am glad you have come to me!
[*Grasps her wrists.*
Now I shall swing you round most nimbly!

SOLVEIG.

Oh, let me go!

PEER GYNT.

Why?

SOLVEIG.

You look so wildly.

PEER GYNT.

The reindeer grows wild when summer's approaching.
Come along, girl! Come, don't be sullen!

SOLVEIG (*drawing back her arm*).

No—no, I daren't.

PEER GYNT.

Why?

SOLVEIG.

No, you've been drinking.
[*Moves away a little, with* HELGA.

PEER GYNT.

I wish I had stuck my knife in the lot of them!

THE BRIDEGROOM (*nudging* PEER'S *elbow*).

Can't you help me to get in there where the bride is?

PEER GYNT (*absently*).

The bride? Where is she?

THE BRIDEGROOM.

In the loft.

PEER GYNT.

Oh, is she?

THE BRIDEGROOM.

Oh, come, Peer—dear Peer—you might try to!

PEER GYNT.

No, you must manage to do without me.
[*A thought strikes him. He says, softly and meaningly:*
Ingrid! The loft! [*Goes up to* SOLVEIG.
Have you made up your mind, then?
[SOLVEIG *turns to get away, but he bars her path.*
I look like a tramp, and so you're ashamed of me.

SOLVEIG (*hastily*).

Oh no, you don't; that isn't the truth.

PEER GYNT.

It is.
And it's because you think I am fuddled;
But that was for spite, because you had hurt me.
Come along, then!

SOLVEIG.

I daren't, if I wanted to.

PEER GYNT.

Who are you frightened of?

SOLVEIG.

Mostly of father.

PEER GYNT.

Your father? Oh, yes—he's one of the solemn ones!
Sanctimonious, isn't he? Answer me!

SOLVEIG.

What shall I say?

PEER GYNT.

Perhaps he's a preacher?
And you and your mother the same, I dare say?
Are you going to answer me?

SOLVEIG.

Let me alone.

PEER GYNT.

I won't! [*In a low but hard and threatening voice.*
I can turn myself into a troll!
I shall come and stand by your bed at midnight;
And if you hear something that's hissing and spitting,
Don't you suppose it's your cat you are hearing.
It is I! And I'll drain your life-blood out of you;
And your little sister—I'll eat her up,
For I turn to a were-wolf whenever the night falls,
Your loins and your back I'll bite all over—
[*Changes his tone suddenly and entreats her anxiously.*
Dance with me, Solveig!

SOLVEIG (*looking darkly at him*).

Ah—now you are horrid.
[*Goes into the house.*

THE BRIDEGROOM (*drifting up to* PEER *again*).
I'll give you an ox, if you'll help me!

PEER GYNT.
Come!

[*They go behind the house. At the same moment a crowd comes back from dancing, most of them drunk. Noise and confusion.* SOLVEIG, HELGA *and their* PARENTS *come out to the door.*

THE STEWARD
(*to* ASLAK, *who is in the front of the crowd*).
Be quiet!

ASLAK (*pulling off his coat*).
No, here we'll settle the matter.
Peer Gynt or I shall get a thrashing.

SOME OF THE CROWD.
Yes, let them fight!

OTHERS.
No, no, let them argue!

ASLAK.
No, we must fight; we want no arguing.

SOLVEIG'S FATHER.
Be quiet, man!

HELGA.
Will he hit him, mother?

A BOY.
It's better fun with his lies to tease him!

ANOTHER.
Kick him out, I say!

A Third.

No, spit in his face!

A Fourth (*to* Aslak).

Are you backing out?

Aslak (*throwing away his coat*).

I'll murder the beggar!

Solveig's Mother (*to* Solveig).

You see now what they think of the booby.

[Aase *comes in, with a cudgel in her hand.*

Aase.

Is my son here? He shall have such a drubbing!
Just wait and you'll see what a thrashing I'll give him!

Aslak (*turning up his shirt-sleeves*).

No, *your* little body's too weak for that.

Voices.

Aslak will thrash him!

Others.

Slash him!

Aslak (*spitting on his hands and nodding to* Aase).

Hang him!

Aase.

What? Hang my Peer? Just try, if you dare!
This old Aase's got teeth and claws!—
Where is he? [*Calls across the courtyard.*
Peer!

The Bridegroom (*running in*).

Oh, God in Heaven!
Come, father! Mother!

HIS FATHER.
Why, what's the matter?

THE BRIDEGROOM.
Oh, Peer Gynt! I—!

AASE (*with a scream*).
What? What? Have you killed him?

THE BRIDEGROOM.
No, Peer Gynt—! Look, up there on the hillside!

VOICES.
With the bride!

AASE (*letting her cudgel fall*).
The beast!

ASLAK (*in amazement*).
Where the hill is steepest
He's climbing, by God!—like a mountain goat!

THE BRIDEGROOM (*in tears*).
And carrying her under his arm like a pig!

AASE (*shaking her fist at* PEER).
I wish he would fall and—! [*Screams anxiously.*
Take care of your footing!

INGRID'S FATHER
(*coming out bareheaded and white with rage*).
I'll have his life for his rape of the bride!

AASE.
No, may God punish me if I let you!

ACT II

SCENE I

(SCENE.—*A narrow track high up on the mountain-side. It is early morning.* PEER GYNT *comes hurriedly and sulkily along the path.* INGRID, *wearing some of her bridal ornaments, is trying to hold him back.*)

PEER GYNT.
Get away!

INGRID (*in tears*).
What, after this?
Where to?

PEER GYNT.
Anywhere you like.

INGRID (*wringing her hands*).
What deceit!

PEER GYNT.
It's no use railing.
We must go our own ways—both.

INGRID.
Think what binds us two together!

PEER GYNT.
Oh, the devil take all thinking!
And the devil take all women—
Except one—!

INGRID.
And who is she?

PEER GYNT.
She's not you.

INGRID.
Who is it, then?

PEER GYNT.
Get you back to where you came from!
Go back to your father!

INGRID.
Dearest——

PEER GYNT.
Pshaw!

INGRID.
You surely can't be meaning
What you say.

PEER GYNT.
I can and do.

INGRID.
To ruin me, and then forsake me?

PEER GYNT.
Well, what have you got to offer?

INGRID.
Hægstad farm, and something more.

PEER GYNT.
Is your prayer-book in your kerchief?
Where's your mane of hair all golden?

Do you glance down at your apron?
Do you hold on to your mother
By her skirt? Come, answer!

INGRID.

No; but——

PEER GYNT.

Shall you go to Confirmation
Very shortly?

INGRID.

No, but dearest——

PEER GYNT.

Are your glances always bashful?
If I beg, can you deny me?

INGRID.

Christ! I think he's lost his senses—!

PEER GYNT.

Does one feel a holy feeling
When one sees you? Answer!

INGRID.

No, but——

PEER GYNT.

Then what matter what you offer?
[*Turns to go.*

INGRID (*confronting him*).

Remember it's a hanging matter
To forsake me now.

PEER GYNT.

So be it.

INGRID.

Rich you may be, and respected,
If you take me——

PEER GYNT.

I can't do it.

INGRID (*bursting into tears*).

Oh, you tempted——

PEER GYNT.

You were willing.

INGRID.

I was wretched.

PEER GYNT.

I was mad.

INGRID (*threateningly*).

You'll pay a heavy price for this!

PEER GYNT.

I should call the heaviest cheap.

INGRID.

Is your mind made up?

PEER GYNT.

Like stone.

INGRID.

Very well. You'll see who'll win.
[*Goes down the hill.*

PEER GYNT

(*is silent for a little; then suddenly calls out*).

Oh, the devil take all thinking!
And the devil take all women!

INGRID (*turns her head and calls up mockingly*).
All but one!

PEER GYNT.
Yes, all but one.
[*They each go their way.*

SCENE II

(SCENE.—*By a mountain lake, on boggy moorland. A storm is blowing up.* AASE, *in despair, is calling and searching in every direction.* SOLVEIG *can scarcely keep pace with her. Her* PARENTS *and* HELGA *are a little way behind.* AASE *beats the air with her arms and tears her hair.*)

AASE.
Everything's against me with the might of anger!
The skies and the water and the hateful mountains!
Fogs from the skies are rolling to mislead him—
Treacherous waters will delude and drown him—
Mountains will crush or slip away beneath him—!
And all these people! They are out to kill him!
By God, they shall not! I can't do without him!
The oaf! To think the devil thus should tempt him!
[*Turns to* SOLVEIG.
Ah, my girl, one simply can't believe it.
He, who was always full of lies and nonsense—
He, who was only clever with his talking—
He, who had never done a thing worth telling—
He—! Oh, I want to laugh and cry together!
We were such friends in our need and troubles.
For, you must know, my husband was a drunkard,
Made us a byword in the neighbours' gossip,
Brought all our good estate to rack and ruin,
While I and Peerkin sat at home together—
Tried to forget—we knew no better counsel;
I was too weak to stand up stoutly to it.

It is so hard to face the fate that's coming;
And so one tries to shake one's sorrows off one,
Or do one's best to rid one's mind of thinking.
Some fly to brandy, others try romancing;
So we found comfort in the fairy stories
All about trolls and princes and such cattle—
Tales, too, of stolen brides—but who would ever
Think that such stories in his mind would linger?
[*Becomes terrified again.*
Ah, what a screech! A nixie or a kelpie!
Peer! Oh, my Peer!—Up there upon the hillock—!
[*Runs up on to a little hillock and looks over the lake.* SOLVEIG'S PARENTS *come up to her.*
Not a thing to be seen!

THE HUSBAND (*quietly*).

It is worst for him.

AASE (*in tears*).

Oh, Peer! my Peer! My own lost lamb!

THE HUSBAND (*nodding his head gently*).

Aye, lost indeed.

AASE.

Say no such thing!
He is so clever; there's no one like him.

THE HUSBAND.

You foolish woman!

AASE.

Oh yes, oh yes,
I may be foolish, but he is fine!

THE HUSBAND
(*always quietly and with a gentle expression*).

His heart is stubborn; his soul is lost.

AASE (*anxiously*).

No, no! God's not so hard as that!

THE HUSBAND.

Do you think he feels the weight of his sinning?

AASE (*hastily*).

No—he can ride through the air on a reindeer!

THE WIFE.

Christ! Are you mad?

THE HUSBAND.

What are you saying?

AASE.

There's nothing that is too great for him.
You'll see, if only he live to do it——

THE HUSBAND.

'Twould be best to see him hang on the gallows.

AASE (*with a scream*).

Good God!

THE HUSBAND.

When he's in the hangman's clutches
Perhaps his heart may turn to repentance.

AASE (*confusedly*).

Your talk will make me dazed and giddy!
We must find him!

THE HUSBAND.

Save his soul.

AASE.

And body!
We must drag him out if he's in the marshes,
And ring church bells if the trolls have got him.

THE HUSBAND.

Ah! Here's a track——

AASE.

May God repay you
If you help me aright!

THE HUSBAND.

'Tis our Christian duty.

AASE.

All the others are naught but heathens!
There was only one that would come and wander—

THE HUSBAND.

They knew him too well.

AASE.

He was much too good for them.
[*Wrings her hands.*
And to think—to think his life is in danger!

THE HUSBAND.

Here's a footprint.

AASE.

That's the way we must go, then!

THE HUSBAND.

We'll scatter and search below the pastures.
[*He and his wife go on.*

SOLVEIG (*to* AASE).

Tell me some more.

AASE (*wiping her eyes*).

About my son?

SOLVEIG.

Yes.
Tell me everything!

AASE (*smiling and holding her head up*).

Everything?
'Twould weary you!

SOLVEIG.

You'd be sooner wearied
With telling me, than I with hearing.

SCENE III

(SCENE.—*Low treeless hills below the higher mountains, whose peaks show in the distance. It is late in the day, and long shadows are falling.* PEER *comes running in at full speed, and stops on a slope.*)

PEER GYNT.

They're after me now—the whole of the parish!
And everyone's taken his stick or his rifle.
The old man from Hægstad is leading them, howling.
It has soon got abroad that Peer Gynt is the quarry!
A different thing from a fight with the blacksmith!
This is life! All my muscles are strong as a bear's.
[*Swings his arms about and leaps into the air.*
To overthrow everything! Breast a waterfall!
Strike! Pull a fir-tree up by the roots!
This is life! It can harden and it can exalt!
To hell with all my trumpery lying!
[*Three* COWHERD GIRLS *run across the hill, shouting and singing.*

THE GIRLS.

Trond of Valfjeld! Baard and Kaare!
Listen, trolls! Would you sleep in our arms.

PEER GYNT.

Who are you shouting for?

THE GIRLS.

Trolls! Trolls! Trolls!

FIRST GIRL.

Trond, come lovingly!

SECOND GIRL.

Come, lusty Baard!

THIRD GIRL.

All the beds in our hut are empty!

FIRST GIRL.

Love is lusty!

SECOND GIRL.

And lustiness love!

THIRD GIRL.

When boys are lacking, one plays with trolls!

PEER GYNT.

Where are your boys, then?

THE GIRLS (*with a burst of laughter*).

They can't come!

FIRST GIRL.

Mine called me dearest and sweetheart too,
Now he is wed to an elderly widow.

SECOND GIRL.

Mine met a gipsy wench up at Lien,
Now they are both on the road together.

THIRD GIRL.

Mine made an end of our bastard brat,
Now on a stake his head is grinning.

ALL THREE.

Trond of Valfjeld! Baard and Kaare!
Listen, trolls! Would you sleep in our arms?

PEER GYNT (*leaping suddenly amongst them*).

I'm a three-headed troll, and the boy for three girls!

THE GIRLS.

Can you tackle the job?

PEER GYNT.

You shall see if I cant

FIRST GIRL.

To the hut! To the hut!

SECOND GIRL.

We have mead!

PEER GYNT.

Let it flow!

THIRD GIRL.

This Saturday night not a bed shall be empty!

SECOND GIRL (*kissing* PEER).

He gleams and glitters like glowing iron!

THIRD GIRL (*kissing* PEER).

Like a baby's eyes from the blackest tarn!

PEER GYNT (*dancing with them*).

Dismal bodings and wanton thoughts,
Laughter in eyes and tears in throat!

THE GIRLS

(*making long noses at the mountain-tops, and shouting and singing*).

Trond of Valfjeld! Baard and Kaare!
Listen, trolls! Did you sleep in our arms?
[*They dance away over the hills with* PEER GYNT *between them.*

SCENE IV

(SCENE.—*Among the mountains. The snowy peaks are gleaming in the sunset.* PEER GYNT *comes in, looking wild and distraught.*)

PEER GYNT.

Palace o'er palace is rising!
See, what a glittering gate!
Stop! Will you stop!—It is moving
Farther and farther away!
The cock on the weather-vane's lifting
Its wings as if for a flight—
Into rifts of rock it has vanished,
And the mountain's barred and locked.
What are these roots and tree-trunks
That grow from the clefts of the ridge?
They are heroes with feet of herons—
And now they are vanished away.
A shimmer like strips of rainbow
My sight and mind assails.
Are they bells that I hear in the distance?
What's weighing my eyebrows down?
Oh, how my forehead's aching—
As if I'd a red-hot band
Pressing—! But who the devil
Put it there I don't know! [*Sinks down.*
A flight o'er the ridge at Gendin—
Romancing and damned lies!

Over the steepest walls with
The bride—and drunk for a day—
Hawks and kites to fight with—
Threatened by trolls and the like—
Sporting with crazy lasses—
Damned romancing and lies!
[*Gazes upwards for a long time.*
There hover two brown eagles;
The wild geese fly to the south;
And I have to trudge and stumble
Knee-deep in mud and mire. [*Springs up.*
I'll go with them! Cleanse my foulness
In a bath of the keenest wind!
Up aloft I'll lave my stains in
That glittering christening-font!
I'll away out over the pastures;
I'll fly till I'm pure and clean—
Fly o'er the ocean waters
O'er the Prince of Engelland's head!
Ah, you may stare, you maidens;
I'm flying, but not to you.
It's of no use your waiting—!
Yet I might swoop below—
Why, where are the two brown eagles?
They've gone to the devil, I think!
See, there's the end of a gable,
It's rising bit by bit;
It's growing out of the rubbish—
See, now the door stands wide!
Aha! I recognize it,
Grandfather's farm new built!
Gone are the clouts from the casements
And the fence that was tumbling down;
Lights gleam from every window;
They are feasting there within.
Listen! The Parson's tapping
His knife upon his glass;
The Captain's hurled his bottle
And broken the mirror to smash.
Let them waste and let them squander!

Hush, mother—there's plenty more!
It's rich John Gynt that is feasting;
Hurrah for the race of Gynt!
What's all the bustle and rumpus?
What are the cries and shouts?
"Where's Peer?" the Captain is calling—
The Parson would drink my health—
Go in, then, Peer, for the verdict;
You shall have it in songs of praise:
Great, Peer, were thy beginnings,
And in great things thou shalt end.

[*He leaps forward, but runs his nose against a rock, falls and remains lying on the ground.*

Scene V

(Scene.—*A mountain-side, with trees in full leaf through which the wind is whispering. Stars are twinkling through the branches. Birds are singing in the tree-tops. A* Woman in Green *crosses the slope. After her follows* Peer Gynt, *performing all sorts of amorous antics.*)

The Woman in Green
(*stopping and turning round*).

Is it true?

Peer Gynt (*drawing his finger across his throat*).

As true as my name is Peer;
As true as that you are a lovely woman!
Will you have me? You'll see how nice I can be;
You shall never have to weave or to spin;
You shall be fed till you're ready to burst;
I promise I never will pull your hair——

The Woman in Green.

Nor strike me, either?

PEER GYNT.

No; is it likely?
We sons of kings don't strike our women.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

A king's son?

PEER GYNT.

Yes.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

I'm the Dovrë-King's daughter.

PEER GYNT.

Are you really? Well, well! How suitable!

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

In the mountains my father has his castle.

PEER GYNT.

And my mother a larger one, let me tell you.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

Do you know my father? His name's King Brosë.

PEER GYNT.

Do you know my mother? Her name's Queen Aase.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

The mountains reel when my father's angry.

PEER GYNT.

If my mother begins to scold, they totter.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

My father can kick to the highest rafters.

PEER GYNT.

My mother can ride through the fiercest river.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

Besides those rags have you other clothing?

PEER GYNT.

Ah, you should see my Sunday garments!

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

My week-day garments are gold and silver.

PEER GYNT.

It looks to me more like tow and grasses.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

Yes. There's just one thing to remember:
We mountain folk have an ancient custom;
All that we have has a double shape.
So when you come to my father's palace
It would not be in the least surprising
If you were inclined to think it merely
A heap of ugly stones and rubbish.

PEER GYNT.

That's just the same as it is with us!
You may think our gold all rust and mildew,
And mistake each glittering window-pane
For a bundle of worn-out clouts and stockings.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

Black looks like white, and ugly like fair.

PEER GYNT.

Big looks like little, and filthy like clean.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN (*falling on his neck*).

Oh, Peer, I see we are splendidly suited!

PEER GYNT.

Like the hair to the comb—or the leg to the breeches.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN (*calling over the hillside*).

My steed! My steed! My wedding steed!

[*A gigantic pig comes running in, with a rope's end for a halter and an old sack for a saddle.* PEER GYNT *swings himself on to its back and seats the* WOMAN IN GREEN *in front of him.*

PEER GYNT.

Houp-là! We'll gallop right into the palace!
Come up! Come up, my noble charger!

THE WOMAN IN GREEN (*caressingly*).

And to think I was feeling so sad and lonely—
One never can tell what is going to happen!

PEER GYNT (*whipping up the pig, which trots off*).

Great folk are known by the steeds they ride!

SCENE VI

(SCENE.—*The Royal Hall of the King of the Trolls. A great assembly of* TROLL COURTIERS, BROWNIES *and* GNOMES. *The* TROLL KING *is seated on his throne, with crown and sceptre. His children and nearest relations sit on either side of him.* PEER GYNT *is standing before him. There is a great uproar in the hall.*)

TROLL COURTIERS.

Slay him! The Christian's son has tempted
The fairest daughter of our King!

A Young Troll.

Let me slash him on the fingers!

Another.

May I tear his hair out for him?

A Troll Maiden.

Let me bite him on the buttocks!

Troll Witch (*with a ladle*).

Let me boil him down for broth!

Another (*holding a chopper*).

Shall he toast on a spit or be browned in a kettle?

The Troll King.

Quiet! Keep calm!
[*Beckons to his counsellors to approach him.*
We must not be too boastful.
Things have been going badly with us lately;
We don't feel sure if we shall last or perish,
And can't afford to throw away assistance.
Besides, the lad is almost without blemish,
And well-built too, as far as I can gather.
It's true enough that he has only *one* head;
But then my daughter hasn't more than one.
Three-headed Trolls are going out of fashion;
Two-headed, even, nowadays aren't common,
And *their* heads usually are not up to much.
[*To* Peer Gynt.
And so, my lad, it's my daughter you're after?

Peer Gynt.

Yes, if she comes with a kingdom for dowry.

The Troll King.

You shall have half while I am living
And the other half when I am done for.

PEER GYNT.

I'm content with that.

THE TROLL KING.

But stop, young fellow,
You've got to give some pledges also.
Break one of them, and our bargain's off
And you don't get out of here alive.
First, you must promise never to give thought to
Aught except what within these hills is bounded;
Shun the day, its deeds, and all the sunlit places.

PEER GYNT.

If I'm called King, 'twill not be hard to do it.

THE TROLL KING.

Secondly—now I'll see how far you're clever——
[*Rises from his seat.*

THE OLDEST TROLL COURTIER (*to* PEER GYNT).

Let's see if you've got a wisdom tooth
That can crack the nut of our monarch's riddle!

THE TROLL KING.

What is the difference between Trolls and Men?

PEER GYNT.

There isn't any, as far as I can gather;
Big trolls would roast and little ones would claw you—
Just as with us if only we dared do it.

THE TROLL KING.

True; we're alike in that and other things too.
Still, just as morning's different from evening,
So there's a real difference between us,
And I will tell you what it is. Out yonder
Under the skies, men have a common saying:

" Man, to thyself be true! " But here, 'mongst Trolls,
" Troll, to thyself be—enough! " it runs.

TROLL COURTIER (*to* PEER GYNT).

Well, do you fathom it?

PEER GYNT.

It seems rather hazy.

THE TROLL KING.

" Enough," my son—that word so fraught with meaning—
Must be the motto written on your buckler.

PEER GYNT (*scratching his head*).

Well, but——

THE TROLL KING.

It *must*, if you're to be a king here!

PEER GYNT.

All right; so be it. It is not much worse than——

THE TROLL KING.

Next you must learn to value rightly
Our simple, homely way of living.
[*He beckons; two* TROLLS *with pigs' heads, wearing white nightcaps, bring food and drink.*
Our cows give cakes and our oxen mead;
No matter whether their taste is sour
Or sweet; the great thing to remember
Is that they're home-made and home-brewed.

PEER GYNT (*pushing the things away from him*).

The devil take your home-brewed drink!
I'll never get used to your country's habits.

THE TROLL KING.

The bowl goes with it, and it is golden.
Who takes the bowl gets my daughter too.

PEER GYNT (*thoughtfully*).

Of course we're told that a man should master
His disposition, and in the long run
Perhaps the drink will taste less sour.
So, here goes! [*Drinks.*

THE TROLL KING.

Now that was sensibly said.
But you spit?

PEER GYNT.

I must trust to the force of habit.

THE TROLL KING.

Next, you must take off all your Christian clothing;
For you must know we boast that in the Dovrë
All's mountain-made; we've nothing from the valleys
Except the bows of silk that deck our tail-tips.

PEER GYNT (*angrily*).

I haven't got a tail!

THE TROLL KING.

Then you shall have one.
[*To one of the courtiers.*
See that my Sunday tail is fastened on him.

PEER GYNT.

No, that he shan't! Do you want to make a fool of me?

THE TROLL KING.

Don't try with tail-less rump to court my daughter.

PEER GYNT.

Making a beast of a man!

THE TROLL KING.

My son, you're wrong there;
I'd only make a courtly wooer of you.
And, as a mark of very highest honour,
The bow you wear shall be of bright flame-colour.

PEER GYNT (*reflectively*).

We're taught, of course, that man is but a shadow;
And one must pay some heed to use and wont, too.
So, tie away!

THE TROLL KING.

You're coming to your senses.

TROLL COURTIER.

Just see how nicely you can wag and wave it!

PEER GYNT (*angrily*).

Now, do you mean to ask anything more of me?
Do you want me to give up my Christian faith?

THE TROLL KING.

No, to keep that you are perfectly welcome.
Faith is quite free, and pays no duty;
It's his dress and its cut that a Troll should be known by.
If we're of one mind as to manners and costume
You're free to believe what would give us the horrors.

PEER GYNT.

You are really, in spite of your many conditions,
More reasonable than one might have expected.

THE TROLL KING.

We Trolls are better than our reputation,
My son; and that is another difference
Between you and us. But now we have finished
The serious part of the present assembly.
Our ears and our eyes shall now be delighted.
Let the harp-maid waken the Dovrë-harp's strings,
Let the dance-maiden tread the Dovrë-hall's floor.
[*Music and a dance.*
What do you think of it?

PEER GYNT.

Think of it? H'm——

THE TROLL KING.

Tell me quite openly. What did you see?

PEER GYNT.

See? What I saw was impossibly ugly.
A bell-cow thrumming her hoof on a gut-string,
A sow in short stockings pretending to dance to it.

THE TROLL COURTIERS.

Eat him!

THE TROLL KING.

Remember his understanding
Is only human.

TROLL MAIDENS.

Oh, tear his eyes out
And cut off his ears!

THE WOMAN IN GREEN (*weeping*).

Are we to endure it,
My sister and I, when we've played and danced?

PEER GYNT.

Oho, was it you? Well, you know, at a banquet
A joke is a joke—no offence was intended.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

Will you swear to me you were only joking?

PEER GYNT.

The dance and the music were both delightful.

THE TROLL KING.

It's a funny thing, this human nature;
It clings to a man with such persistence.
Suppose we fight it and it is wounded,
There may be a scar, but it heals up quickly.
My son-in-law's now most accommodating;
He has willingly cast off his Christian breeches,
Willingly drunk of the mead-filled goblet,
Willingly tied on a tail behind him—
Is so willing, in fact, to do all we ask him
That I certainly thought the old Adam banished
For good and all; then, all of a sudden,
We find him uppermost. Yes, my son,
You certainly must undergo some treatment
To cure this troublesome human nature.

PEER GYNT.

What will you do?

THE TROLL KING.

I'll scratch you slightly
In the left eye, and then your vision
Will be oblique, and all you look on
Will seem to you to be perfection.
Then I'll cut out your right-hand window——

PEER GYNT.

You're drunk!

THE TROLL KING
(*laying some sharp instruments on the table*).
See, here are the glazier's tools.
You must be tamed like a raging bullock;
Then you'll perceive that your bride is lovely,
And never again will your sight deceive you
With dancing sows or bell-cows thrumming—

PEER GYNT.
That's fool's talk.

THE OLDEST COURTIER.
It's the Troll King's word;
He is the wise man and you the fool.

THE TROLL KING.
Just think what a lot of trouble and worry
You will be rid of for good and all.
Remember, too, that the eye is the source
Of the bitter, searing flood of tears.

PEER GYNT.
That's true; and it says in the family Bible:
" If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out."
But, tell me, when will my sight recover
And be as it is now?

THE TROLL KING.
Never, my friend.

PEER GYNT.
Oh, really! Then I must decline with thanks.

THE TROLL KING.
But what do you mean to do?

PEER GYNT.
To leave you.

THE TROLL KING.

Softly! It's easy to get within here;
But the Troll King's gate doesn't open outwards.

PEER GYNT.

You surely don't mean to detain me by force?

THE TROLL KING.

Now listen, Prince Peer, and give way to reason!
You're cut out for a Troll. Why, look, already
You bear yourself quite in a Troll-like fashion!
And you want to become one, don't you?

PEER GYNT.

Of course.
In return for a bride and a well-found kingdom
I'm not unwilling to sacrifice something;
But all things have their natural limit.
I have taken a tail, it is true; but then
I can undo the knots that our friend has tied,
And take the thing off. I have shed my breeches;
They were old and patched; but that won't prevent me
From putting them on if I have a mind to.
I shall probably find it just as easy
To deal with your Trollish way of living.
I can easily swear that a cow's a maiden;
An oath's not a difficult thing to swallow.
But to know that one never can get one's freedom—
Not even to die as a human being—
To end one's days as a Troll of the mountains—
Never go back, as you tell me plainly—
That is a thing that I'll not submit to.

THE TROLL KING.

Now, on my sins, I'm getting angry;
I'm not in the mood to be made a fool of.
You scurvy lout! Do you know who I am?
To begin with, you make too free with my daughter—

PEER GYNT.

That's a lie in your throat!

THE TROLL KING.

And you'll have to marry her.

PEER GYNT.

Do you dare accuse me of—?

THE TROLL KING.

Can you deny
That she was the object of all your desire?

PEER GYNT (*whistles*).

But no more than that. What the deuce does that matter?

THE TROLL KING.

You human beings are always the same.
You are always ready to talk of your souls,
But heed nothing really save what is tangible.
You think desires are things that don't matter?
Wait; your own eyes will prove to you shortly——

PEER GYNT.

It's no use baiting your hook with lies!

THE TROLL KING.

My Peer, ere the year's out you'll be a father.

PEER GYNT.

Unlock the doors. I'm going.

THE TROLL KING.

We'll send you
The brat in a goat-skin.

PEER GYNT (*wiping the sweat from his brow*).
I wish I could wake up!

THE TROLL KING.
Shall we send to your Palace?

PEER GYNT.
Oh, send to the Parish!

THE TROLL KING.
As you like, Prince Peer; it's your affair solely.
But one thing is certain—what's done can't be undone,
And you will see how your offspring will grow up!
Mongrels like that grow remarkably quickly——

PEER GYNT.
Oh, come, old chap, don't go at me like a bullock!
Fair maiden, be reasonable! Let's come to terms.
I have to confess that I'm neither a prince
Nor rich; and, however you take my measure,
I'm sure you won't find you've made much of a bargain.
[*The* WOMAN IN GREEN *faints and is carried out by the* TROLL MAIDENS.

THE TROLL KING
(*looks at him for a while with a contemptuous expression, then says*).
Dash him to bits on the rocks, my good children!

YOUNG TROLLS.
Dad, mayn't we first play at Owls and Eagles?
Or the Wolf-Game? Or Grey Mouse and Red-Eyed Pussy?

THE TROLL KING.
Yes, but be quick. I'm angry and sleepy.
Good night! [*Goes.*

PEER GYNT (*hunted by the* YOUNG TROLLS).

Let me go, you young devils!
[*Tries to climb up the chimney.*

YOUNG TROLLS.

Hobgoblins!
Brownies! Come, bite him!

PEER GYNT.

Ow!
[*Tries to get away through the cellar-flap.*

YOUNG TROLLS.

Stop all the holes up!

TROLL COURTIER.

How the youngsters enjoy it!

PEER GYNT
(*fighting with a little* TROLL *who has bitten deep into his ear*).

You filth, let go!

TROLL COURTIER
(*rapping* PEER GYNT *over the knuckles*).

A little respect for a king's son, you scoundrel!

PEER GYNT.

Ah! A rat hole! [*Runs towards it.*

YOUNG TROLLS.

Stop up the holes, Brownie brothers!

PEER GYNT.

The old man was foul, but the young ones are worse!

YOUNG TROLLS.

Flay him!

PEER GYNT.

I wish I were small as a mouse!

YOUNG TROLLS (*swarming about him*).

Don't let him escape!

PEER GYNT.

I wish I were a louse!

YOUNG TROLLS.

Now jump on his face!

PEER GYNT (*smothered in* TROLLS).

Help, mother, I'm dying!

[*Church bells are heard afar off.*

YOUNG TROLLS.

Bells in the Valley! The Blackfrock's Cows!

[*The* TROLLS *disperse in a turmoil and wild shrieks. The Hall falls to pieces. Everything disappears.*

SCENE VII

(*Pitch darkness.* PEER GYNT *is heard slashing and hitting about him with a branch of a tree.*)

PEER GYNT.

Answer! Who are you?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS.

Myself!

PEER GYNT.

Let me pass, then!

VOICE.

Go round about, Peer! Room enough on the mountain.

[PEER GYNT *tries to pass another way, but runs up against something.*

PEER GYNT.

Who are you?

VOICE.

Myself. Can you say as much?

PEER GYNT.

I can say what I like, and my sword can strike!
Look out for yourself! I'm going to smash you!
King Saul slew hundreds; Peer Gynt slays thousands!
[*Hits about him wildly.*
Who are you?

VOICE.

Myself.

PEER GYNT.

That's a silly answer,
And you can keep it. It tells me nothing.
What are you?

VOICE.

The great Boyg.[1]

PEER GYNT.

No, are you really?
Things were black before; now some grey is showing.
Out of my way, Boyg!

VOICE.

Go round about, Peer!

[1] A monstrous invisible Troll whose legend occurs frequently in Scandinavian folklore.

PEER GYNT.

No, through you! [*Hits out wildly.*
He's down!
[*Tries to get on, but always runs up against something.*
Ha, ha! Are there more of you?

VOICE.

The Boyg, Peer Gynt! The one and only.
The Boyg that's unwounded, the Boyg that was hurt.
The Boyg that was dead and the Boyg that's alive.

PEER GYNT (*throwing away his branch*).

My weapon's bewitched; but I have my fists!
[*Strikes out in front of him.*

VOICE.

Yes, put your trust in your fists and strength!
Ho, ho! Peer Gynt, they'll bring you out top!

PEER GYNT.

Backward or forward, it's just as far—
Out or in, the way's as narrow.
It's there!—and there!—and all about me!
I think I've got out, and I'm back in the midst of it.
What's your name! Let me see you! Say what you are!

VOICE.

The Boyg.

PEER GYNT (*feeling round him*).

Neither dead, nor alive; slime and mistiness;
No shape or form! It's as if one were smothered
Amidst any number of bears that are growling
At being waked up! [*Shrieks.*
Why don't you hit out at me!

VOICE.

The Boyg's not so foolish as that.

PEER GYNT.

Oh, strike at me!

VOICE.

The Boyg doesn't strike.

PEER GYNT.

Come, fight! You *shall* fight with me!

VOICE.

The great Boyg can triumph without any fighting.

PEER GYNT.

I'd far rather it were the Brownies tormenting me!
Or even as much as a one-year-old Troll!
Just something to fight with—and not this blank nothingness!
It's snoring now! Boyg!

VOICE.

What is it?

PEER GYNT.

Show fight, will you!

VOICE.

The great Boyg can get all he wishes by gentleness.

PEER GYNT (*biting his own hands and arms*).

Oh, for claws and teeth that would tear my flesh!
I must see a drop of my own blood flow!

[*A sound is heard like the beating of wings of great birds.*

BIRDS' CRIES.

Is he coming, Boyg?

VOICE.

Yes, foot by foot.

BIRDS' CRIES.

Sisters afar off, fly to meet us!

PEER GYNT.

If you mean to save me, girl, be quick!
Don't hang your head and look down blushing.
Your prayer-book! Hit him straight in the eye with it!

BIRDS' CRIES.

He's failing!

VOICE.

He's ours.

BIRDS' CRIES.

Come, sisters, quickly!

PEER GYNT.

An hour of torture such as this
Is too dear a price to pay for life. [*Sinks down.*

BIRDS' CRIES.

Boyg, he is down! Boyg, seize him! Seize him!

[*Church bells and the singing of psalms are heard in the distance.*

VOICE

(*with a gasp, as the* BOYG *gradually dwindles away to nothing*).

He was too strong. There were women behind him.

Scene VIII

(Scene.—*On the hillside outside a hut on* Aase's *mountain pasture. It is sunrise. The door of the hut is barred. Everything is empty and still.* Peer Gynt *lies asleep by the hut. Presently he wakes and looks around him with listless and heavy eyes.*)

Peer Gynt (*spitting*).

I'd give the world for a pickled herring!
[*He spits again; then he sees* Helga *approaching, carrying a basket of food.*
You here, youngster? What do you want?

Helga.

It was Solveig——

Peer Gynt (*springing up*).

Where is she?

Helga.

Behind the hut.

Solveig (*from behind the hut*).

If you come any nearer, I'll run away!

Peer Gynt (*standing still*).

Perhaps you're afraid I shall carry you off?

Solveig.

For shame!

Peer Gynt.

Do you know where I was last night?
The Troll King's daughter is hunting me down.

Solveig.

'Twas well done, then, that we rang the bells.

PEER GYNT.

Oh, Peer Gynt's not quite the lad to get caught—
What's that you say?

HELGA (*crying*).

She's running away.
[*Runs after* SOLVEIG.
Wait for me!

PEER GYNT (*gripping her by the arm*).

See what I've got in my pocket!
A fine silver button! And you shall have it
If you speak up for me!

HELGA.

Oh, let me go!

PEER GYNT.

Take it, then.

HELGA.

Oh, let me go!—and my basket!

PEER GYNT.

You had better look out if you don't—!

HELGA.

Oh, you frighten me!

PEER GYNT (*quietly, as he lets her go*).

No; all I meant was: don't let her forget me!
[HELGA *runs off.*

ACT III

SCENE I

(SCENE.—*The depths of a pine-wood. It is a grey autumn day, and snow is falling.* PEER GYNT *is in his shirt-sleeves, felling timber. He has just tackled a tall tree with crooked branches.*)

PEER GYNT.

Oh yes, you're tough, my ancient friend,
But that won't help you; you're coming down!
[*Sets to work again.*
I know you're wearing a coat of mail;
But I'll slash through, were it never so strong.
Yes, you may shake your crooked arms;
I daresay you're both fierce and angry,
But all the same you shall bow to me—!
[*Suddenly breaks off sullenly.*
What lies! It's only an ancient tree.
What lies! I'm fighting no mail-clad foe;
It's only a fir with its bark all cracked.
It's toilsome work, this felling timber;
But the devil's own job when all the time
One's dreams get mixed up with one's working.
All that must stop—this daytime dreaming
And always being in the clouds.
My lad, remember that you're an outlaw!
Your only shelter's in this forest.
[*Works again hurriedly for a while.*
An outlaw, yes. You have no mother
To bring you food and spread your table.
If you want to eat, you must help yourself;
Get what you can from the woods and the stream,
Forage for sticks if you want a fire,

Look to yourself for everything.
If you need clothes, you must skin a deer;
If you want a wall to put round your house,
You must break the stones; if you want to build,
You must fell the timber and shoulder it
And carry it to the spot you've chosen.
[*He lets his axe fall and stares in front of him.*
I'll build a beauty! Up on the roof
I'll have a tower and weather-vane,
And on the gable-end I'll carve
A lovely mermaid. Vane and locks
Shall be of brass, and window panes
Shall shine so bright that from afar
People shall wonder what it is
That they see gleaming in the sun.
[*Laughs bitterly.*
Damned lies! Why, there I go again!
Remember that you're an outlaw, boy!
[*Sets to work feverishly.*
A well-thatched hut is quite enough
To keep out both the frost and rain.
[*Looks up at the tree.*
It's giving way. One more stroke! There!
He's down and fallen all his length,
And all the undergrowth is quivering.
[*Sets to work to lop off the branches; all at once he stops and listens, with uplifted axe.*
There's someone coming! Ingrid's father—
Trying to catch me treacherously!
[*Hides behind a tree and peeps out.*
A boy! Just one. And he looks frightened.
He's glancing round him. What is that
He's hiding underneath his jacket?
A sickle. Now he stands and looks—
He lays his hand upon a log——
What now? Why does he brace himself—?
Ugh! He has chopped a finger off!
And now he's bleeding like a pig—
And now he runs off with his hand
Wrapped in a clout. [*Comes forward.*

He must be mad!
Chopped it right off!—a precious finger!
And did it, too, as if he meant it.
Oho, I see! If one's not anxious
To serve His Gracious Majesty
That is the only way. So that's it!
They would have called him for the army,
But he, I see, would be exempted.
Still, to cut off—? To lose for ever—?
The thought, perhaps—the wish—the will—
Those I could understand; but really
To *do* the deed! Ah, no—that beats me!
[*Shakes his head a little; then resumes his work.*

Scene II

(Scene.—*A room in* Aase's *house. Everything is in disorder. The clothes-chest is standing open; clothes lie scattered about; a cat is lying on the bed.* Aase *and* Kari *are trying to put things in order.*)

Aase (*running to one side of the room*).
Kari, tell me——

Kari.
What is it?

Aase.
Tell me——
Where is—? Where shall I find—? Oh, tell me,
Where is—? What am I looking for?
I'm going crazy! Where's the chest key?

Kari.
It's in the keyhole.

Aase.
What's that rumbling?

KARI.

The last load going off to Hægstad.[1]

AASE (*weeping*).

I wish they were taking me in my coffin!
What we poor creatures have to suffer!
God pity me! The whole house emptied!
What Hægstad left, the Judge has taken.
They've scarcely left me with a rag
To put upon my back. It's shameful
To have pronounced so hard a sentence!
[*Sits down on the edge of the bed.*
The farm's gone now, and all our land.
He's a hard man, but the Law was harder;
No one to help me—none showed mercy—
Peer gone, and no one to advise me.

KARI.

You've got this house until you die.

AASE.

Oh, yes—the bread of charity,
For me and for my cat!

KARI.

Old mother,
God help you! Peer has cost you dear.

AASE.

My Peer? I think you've lost your senses!
They got their Ingrid, safe and sound.
They should have rightly blamed the Devil;
He is the culprit, and no other;
'Twas he, the ugly beast, that tempted
My poor dear boy!

[1] As sentence for his crime of the rape of Ingrid, Peer Gynt has been proclaimed an outlaw and the forest his only sanctuary. All his possessions have become forfeit to Ingrid's father and to the law.

KARI.

Had you not better
Send for the priest? For all you know,
Things may be worse than you believe.

AASE.

Send for the priest? Perhaps I'd better. [*Gets up.*
No, no—I cannot! I'm his mother;
I must help the boy—it's only my duty;
I must do my best, when everyone fails me.
They've left him that coat. I must get it patched.
I wish I had dared to keep the bed-cover!
Where are the stockings?

KARI.

There, with that rubbish.

AASE (*fumbling among the things*).

What's this? Look here! An old casting-ladle!
He used to pretend to mould buttons with this,
Melt them and shape them and stamp them too.
Once, when we'd company, in came the boy
And begged of his father a bit of tin.
" Not tin," said John, " King Christian's coin!
A silver coin to melt, and show
That you're the son of rich John Gynt."
May God forgive him, for he was drunk;
And when he was drunk it was all the same,
Tin or gold. Ah, here are the stockings!
They are all in holes; I must darn them, Kari.

KARI.

They certainly need it.

AASE.

When that is done,
I must go to bed. I feel so bad,

So wretchedly ill. [*Joyfully.*
Oh, look here, Kari!
Two flannel shirts that they have forgotten!

KARI.

Aye, so they have.

AASE.

That's a lucky find.
You might put one of them aside.
Or—no, I think we'll take them both;
The one he has on is so thin and worn.

KARI.

But, Aase, you know that it's a sin!

AASE.

Oh, yes; but you know the parson tells us
That all our sins may be forgiven.

SCENE III

(SCENE.—*Outside a newly built hut in the forest. Reindeer horns over the door. Deep snow everywhere. It is nightfall.* PEER GYNT *is standing fixing a heavy wooden bolt to the door.*)

PEER GYNT (*laughing now and then*).

There must be a bolt, to fasten my door
Against the Troll-folk and men and women.
There must be a bolt, to keep me safe
From all the plaguy crowd of goblins.
They'll come when it's dark, and I'll hear them knocking:
" Open, Peer, we are quick as thoughts!
Under the bed, on the hearth in the ashes,
You'll hear us creeping and crawling about;

We'll fly down the chimney like fiery dragons.
Hee-hee! Do you think your nails and planks
Can save you from plaguy goblin-thoughts?"

[SOLVEIG *comes over the snow on ski; she has a shawl over her head and a bundle in her hand.*

SOLVEIG.

God bless your work. You must not reject me.
I had your message, and you must take me.

PEER GYNT.

Solveig! It can't be—! Yes, it is!
And not afraid to come so near me!

SOLVEIG.

I had your message from little Helga,
And others I had from the winds and the silence.
There was one in all that your mother told me,
And others that came to me in my dreams.
The dreary nights and the empty days
Brought me the message that I must come.
All light had gone from my life down yonder;
I had neither the heart to laugh nor to weep.
I could not tell what was in your mind;
I could only tell what I needs must do.

PEER GYNT.

But your father?

SOLVEIG.

I've no one on God's wide earth
That I can call father or mother now;
I've left them for ever.

PEER GYNT.

Solveig, my dear—
To come to me?

SOLVEIG.

Yes, to you alone;
You must be all to me—friend and comfort.
[*In tears.*
The worst was leaving my little sister;
And worse than that, to leave my father;
And worst of all to leave her who carried me
At her breast; no, God forgive me,
The worst indeed was the bitter sorrow
That I must part from all my dear ones!

PEER GYNT.

And do you know the heavy sentence
The law pronounced? They've taken from me
Everything that I had or might have.

SOLVEIG.

'Twas not for what you had or might have
I gave up what was dearest to me.

PEER GYNT.

And do you know that if I venture
Beyond this forest I am forfeit
If any man can lay hand on me?

SOLVEIG.

When I asked my way as I came hither,
They questioned me—where was I going?
"I'm going home": that was my answer.

PEER GYNT.

Ah, then I need no bolts to guard me,
No locks against the powers of evil!
My hunter's hut is consecrated
If you deign enter it and live there.
Dear, let me look at you! Not too near you—
I'd only look at you! How lovely,
How pure you are! Let my arms lift you!

How slim and light you are, my Solveig!
I'd carry you for ever, dearest,
And never weary! I'll not soil you;
I'll hold your warm and lovely body
At arms' length from me! Ah, my Solveig,
Can I believe I've made you love me?
Both night and day 'tis what I've longed for.
See, I have built this little dwelling—
It shall come down; it's cramped and ugly——

SOLVEIG.

Little or big, I'm happy here.
Here one can breathe, in the buffeting wind.
Down yonder 'twas sultry; I felt hemmed in;
It was partly that, that drove me away.
But here, where one hears the fir trees soughing—
Such song and silence!—I feel at home.

PEER GYNT.

But, dear, are you sure? It means for ever!

SOLVEIG.

There's no way back on the road I have trodden.

PEER GYNT.

You're mine, then! Go in! I would see you within!
Go in! I will fetch some wood for a fire,
To warm you snugly and flicker brightly;
You shall sit soft and never shiver.

[*He unbars the door, and* SOLVEIG *goes in. He stands silent for a moment, then laughs aloud for joy and leaps into the air.*

My princess! Now she is found and won!
Now my palace shall spring into being!

[*Seizes his axe and crosses over towards the trees. At the same moment an elderly woman in a tattered green gown advances out of the wood; an ugly child with a flagon in his hand limps after her, holding on to her skirt.*

THE WOMAN.

Good evening, Peer Light-Foot!

PEER GYNT.

What is it? Who are you?

THE WOMAN.

Old friends, Peer Gynt! My hut is quite near here.
We're neighbours.

PEER GYNT.

Indeed? I was not aware of it.

THE WOMAN.

As your hut grew up, so mine grew beside it.

PEER GYNT (*trying to get away*).

I'm in a great hurry.

THE WOMAN.

You always were that;
But, trudging along, in the end I come up with you.

PEER GYNT.

Old dame, you're mistaken!

THE WOMAN.

I know I was once;
That day when you made me such wonderful promises.

PEER GYNT.

I made you promises? Why, what the devil—?

THE WOMAN.

Do you mean you've forgotten the night when you drank
At my father's? Do you mean you've forgotten——

PEER GYNT.

I mean
I've forgotten what never took place to remember!
What nonsense is this? And when last did we meet?

THE WOMAN.

The last time we met was the first time we met.
[*To the child.*
Give your father a drink; I think he is thirsty.

PEER GYNT.

His father? You're drunk! Do you mean that this urchin—?

THE WOMAN.

You're not going to say that you can't recognise him?
Have you eyes? Can't you see that he's lame in the shanks
As you're lame in your mind?

PEER GYNT.

Do you mean to pretend that—?

THE WOMAN.

You can't wriggle out of it!

PEER GYNT.

That long-legged brat—?

THE WOMAN.

He has grown very fast.

PEER GYNT.

Why, you ugly old hag,
Do you dare to assert that this—?

THE WOMAN.

Listen, Peer Gynt;
You're as coarse as a bullock. [*Weeps.*
Oh, how can I help it
If I'm not as fair as I was when you tempted me
Out on the hill-side up there in the mountains?
And when in the autumn my travail came on me,
I'd only the Devil to act as a midwife;
So it isn't surprising I lost all my beauty.
But if you would see me as fair as before,
You've only to turn out that girl that's in there,
Out of your house and your mind and your sight;
Do that, dearest lad, and my ill-looks will vanish!

PEER GYNT.

Get away, you old witch!

THE WOMAN.

You shall see if I will!

PEER GYNT.

I'll break your head for you!

THE WOMAN.

Try, if you dare!
You'll find me, Peer, a hard nut to crack!
Every day I shall be back again,
Peeping at doors and spying on both of you.
When you and your girl are sitting together,
And you are inclined for cuddling and fondling,
You'll find me beside you, claiming my share of it.
She and I will share you—turn about.
Good-bye, dear boy. If you like the prospect,
Then wed her to-morrow!

PEER GYNT.

You devil's nightmare!

THE WOMAN.

But I had forgotten! You've got to look after
Your little son—this graceful urchin!
Come on, little imp, will you go to your father?

THE BOY (*spitting at* PEER).

If I had an axe, I'd split you in two with it!
Just wait!

THE WOMAN (*kissing the* BOY).

What a head he's got on his shoulders!
When you've grown up you'll be just like your father!

PEER GYNT (*stamping his foot*).

I wish you——

THE WOMAN.

As far off as now we are near you?

PEER GYNT (*clenching his fists*).

And all this comes——

THE WOMAN.

Just of thoughts and desires!
Hard luck for you, Peer!

PEER GYNT.

It's hardest for her—
For Solveig—my loveliest, purest treasure!

THE WOMAN.

Oh, yes; the innocent always suffer—
As the Devil said when his mother thrashed him
Because his father had come home drunk!

[*She moves off into the wood with the* BOY, *who throws the flagon behind him.*

PEER GYNT (*after a long silence*).

"Round about," said the Boyg; that's how I must go.—
My palace has trembled about my ears!
She was so near me; and now there has risen
A wall between us, and all in a moment
My joy is gone and everything's ugly.
"Round about"—ah, yes; there's no straight road
That leads through this from me to her.
No straight road? All the same, there might be.
If I remember aright, the Bible
Says something somewhere about repentance—
But I've no Bible, and I've forgotten
The most of it, and in this forest
There's not a thing that will give me guidance.
Repent? It might take years to do it
Before I found the way. And, meanwhile,
A life that's empty, ugly, dreary;
And in the end from shreds and fragments
To try and patch the thing together?
One can patch up a broken fiddle,
But not a watch-spring. If one tramples
On growing things they're spoiled for ever.—
But, surely, the old witch was lying!
I can put all those ugly doings
Out of my sight! But—can I put them
Out of my mind? I shall be haunted
By lurking memories—of Ingrid—
Of those three girls upon the hillside.
Will they come too, and jeer and threaten,
And beg of me to hold them closely
Or lift them tenderly at arms' length?
It's no use! Were my arms as long
As fir-trees' stems or pine-trees' branches,
I should be holding *her* too near
To set her down again unsullied.
I must find some way round about,
Without a thought of gain or loss;
Some way to free me from such thoughts

And shut them from my mind for ever.
[*Takes a few steps towards the hut, then stops.*
But—go in now? Disgraced and soiled?
With all these Troll-folk at my heels?
Speak, and yet not tell all? Confess,
And still be hiding something from her?
[*Throws away his axe.*
No, no—to go and meet her now,
Such as I am, were sacrilege.
[SOLVEIG *appears at the door of the hut.*

SOLVEIG.

Are you coming, dear?

PEER GYNT (*below his breath*).

"Go round about"!

SOLVEIG.

What do you say?

PEER GYNT.

Dear, you must wait.
It's dark, and I've a heavy load.

SOLVEIG.

I'll come and help you bear the load.

PEER GYNT.

No, do not come! Stay where you are!
I'll bear the whole of it.

SOLVEIG.

But, dear,
Don't be too long.

PEER GYNT.

Be patient, child;
Whether the time is long or short,
You must just wait.

SOLVEIG (*nodding to him*).

Yes, I will wait.

[PEER GYNT *goes off along the forest path.* SOLVEIG *remains standing at the half-open door.*

SCENE IV

(SCENE.—AASE'S *house. It is evening. A log fire is burning on the hearth and lights up the room. A cat is lying on a chair at the foot of a bed on which* AASE *is lying, fumbling restlessly with the sheets.*)

AASE.

Ah me, is my son never coming?
The nights are so weary and long.
I've no one to take him a message,
And so much to say to him now,
My time's running short—oh, how quickly!
To think that the end should be this!
If only I'd known, I would never
Have said a hard word to the boy!

[PEER GYNT *comes in.*

PEER GYNT.

Good evening!

AASE.

My boy! Oh, God bless you!
My dearest, at last you have come!
But how have you dared to come hither?
Your life is in danger, you know.

PEER GYNT.

My life?—oh, my life doesn't matter.
I had to come down to you now.

AASE.

And Kari!—she said that you wouldn't!
Ah, now I can leave you in peace.

PEER GYNT.

Leave me? Why, what are you saying?
And where do you think you can go?

AASE.

Ah, Peer, it's the end that's approaching;
I haven't much longer to live.

PEER GYNT
(*turning away abruptly and walking across the room*).

I was running away from my sorrows,
And thought at least here I'd be free—!
Are you cold? Are your hands and your feet cold?

AASE.

Yes, Peer; you'll be done with me soon.
When my eyes lose their light you must close them—
But tenderly, carefully, Peer.
And then you must get me a coffin,
And see that it's handsome and fine.
Ah no, I forgot——

PEER GYNT.

Do be quiet!
Time enough for all that by-and-by.

AASE.

Yes, yes. [*Looks uneasily round the room.*
Do you see what a little
They've left me? It's all one to them.

PEER GYNT (*with a grimace*).

There you go! [*Harshly.*
Yes, I know I am guilty.
But what do you think is the good
Of raking it up to remind me?

AASE.

No! It was the drink was to blame.
That damnable drink that destroyed you,
My boy; for you know you were drunk,
And didn't know what you were doing.
Besides—that wild ride on the buck!—
I'm sure it was not to be wondered
If you were not right in your head.

PEER GYNT.

Never mind all that nonsense and rubbish;
Never mind about anything now.
Let's put off serious thinking
Till later—another day.
[*Sits down on the edge of the bed.*
Now, mother, let's have a gossip,
And talk of all sorts of things,
Except what's ugly and horrid
And hurts—let's forget all that.
Bless me! Why, there's old pussy!
To think that he's still alive!

AASE.

At night he seems so uneasy;
And we all know what that means!

PEER GYNT (*turning away*).

What is the news in the district?

AASE (*smiling*).

They do say that hereabouts
There's a girl that longs for the mountains——

PEER GYNT (*hastily*).

Mads Moen—is he content?

AASE.

They say that she will not listen
To the old folks' prayers and tears.
You ought to go and see her;
Maybe you could find a way——

PEER GYNT.

And what's become of the blacksmith?

AASE.

Oh, bother the dirty smith!
I'd so much rather tell you
Her name—that girl's, you know——

PEER GYNT.

No, we're going to have a gossip,
And talk of all sorts of things,
Except what's ugly and horrid
And hurts—let's forget all that.
Shall I fetch you a drink? Are you thirsty?
Can you stretch in that little bed?
Let me look—why, this is surely
The bed I had as a boy!
Do you remember your sitting
Beside my bed at night
Smoothing the bed-spread over
And singing me rhymes and songs?

AASE.

Yes, and we played at sleighing,
When your father had gone away—
The bed-spread was our apron,
And the floor an ice-bound fjord.

PEER GYNT.

Yes, but do you remember
The finest bit of it all—
Our pair of prancing horses?

AASE.

Why, yes—of course I do.
'Twas Kari's cat we borrowed,
And put up on a stool.

PEER GYNT.

To Soria-Moria [1] Castle,
That's westward of the moon
And eastward of the sunrise,
O'er hill and dale we flew.
A stick that we found in the cupboard
Made you a splendid whip.

AASE.

I sat up like the driver——

PEER GYNT.

Yes, and you shook the reins;
And turned round as we galloped,
To ask if I were cold.
God bless you, you old scolder!
You were a dear to me——
Why do you groan?

AASE.

It's my back, Peer;
It's sore from lying here.

PEER GYNT.

Stretch up and I'll support you.
There—now you're lying snug.

[1] The name is taken from the Arabic name of a group of islands beyond the Red Sea which were fabled to be the Isles of the Blest.

Aase (*uneasily*).

I want to get away, Peer.

Peer Gynt.

To get away?

Aase.

Ah, yes—
It's what I'm always longing.

Peer Gynt.

What senseless talk is that?
See, let me smooth the bed-clothes
And then sit on the bed,—
Now, we will make the time fly
With singing rhymes and songs.

Aase.

No, let me have my prayer-book;
My mind is ill at ease.

Peer Gynt.

In Soria-Moria Castle
They're having a splendid feast.
Rest back upon the cushions;
I'll drive you quickly there——

Aase.

But, dear, am I invited?

Peer Gynt.

Of course—and I am, too.

[*He throws a cord round the back of the chair on which the cat is lying, takes a stick in his hand and sits down on the foot of the bed.*

Gee up! Get on with you, Blackie!
Mother, you're sure you're not cold?

Aha! Now we shall be moving,
When Granë kicks up his heels!

AASE.

But, Peer—I hear something ringing——

PEER GYNT.

It's the glittering sleigh-bells, dear.

AASE.

They sound so strange and hollow!

PEER GYNT.

We're driving over a fjord.

AASE.

I'm frightened! What is it that's sighing
And moaning so wild and drear?

PEER GYNT.

It's only the firs on the hillside
Whispering. Just sit still.

AASE.

I seem to see lights in the distance.
What is it that's glistening there?

PEER GYNT.

It's the windows and gates of the Castle.
Can you hear the dancers?

AASE.

Yes.

PEER GYNT.

And outside stands Saint Peter
Asking you to come in.

AASE.

Does he greet me?

PEER GYNT.

Yes, with honour,
And offers you sweetest wine.

AASE.

Wine! Does he offer cakes, too?

PEER GYNT.

A plateful of them, yes!
And our parson's wife preparing
Your coffee and your dessert.

AASE.

What! Shall I really meet her?

PEER GYNT.

As soon and as oft as you please.

AASE.

You're driving your poor old mother
To a splendid party, Peer!

PEER GYNT (*smacking his whip*).

Gee up! Get on with you, Blackie!

AASE.

Are you sure that you know the way?

PEER GYNT (*smacking his whip again*).

I can see the road.

AASE.

But the journey
Makes me feel ill and tired.

PEER GYNT.

I can see the Castle before me;
The drive will soon be done.

AASE.

I'll lie back with my eyes shut,
And trust to you, my boy!

PEER GYNT.

Now show your paces, Granë!
The Castle is all agog;
The folk all swarm to the gateway;
Peer Gynt and his mother arrive!
Why, what's that, Mister Saint Peter?
You won't let my mother in?
You must look far, I can tell you,
To find a worthier soul.
Of myself I will say nothing;
I can turn back to the gate.
I'll take pot-luck, if you'll have me;
If not, it's all one to me.
Like the Devil in the pulpit,
I've told a heap of lies,
And have called my dear old mother
A silly old hen, I know,
Because she cackled and scolded;
But things must be different here.
You must respect and revere her,
Sincerely and honestly;
You'll not get anyone better
From our parts nowadays.—
Oho! Here's God the Father!
Saint Peter, you'll catch it now!
[*Speaks in a deep voice.*
" Just stop that bullying, will you!
Mother Aase is welcome here! "
[*Laughs aloud and turns to his mother.*

I knew how 'twould be! Saint Peter
Is singing small enough now!
[*His voice takes on an anxious tone.*
Why do you stare so, mother?
Have you lost your senses, dear?
[*Goes to the head of the bed.*
You mustn't lie and stare so—!
Speak, mother; it's I, your boy!
[*Feels her forehead and hands cautiously; then throws the cord away on to the chair and says in a low voice:*
So it's that!—You may rest now, Granë;
Our journey's over and done.
[*Shuts her eyes and bends over her.*
Thanks, dear, for all you gave me,
Thrashings and kisses alike!
And now it's for you to thank me—
[*Presses his cheek against her lips.*
There—that was the driver's fee.
[KARI *comes in.*

KARI.

What? Peer! Then her deepest sorrow
And grieving will be forgot!
Good Lord, how sound she is sleeping!
Or is she—?

PEER GYNT.

Hush, she is dead.
[KARI *weeps by* AASE'S *body.* PEER GYNT *walks to and fro in the room; at last he stops by the bedside.*

PEER GYNT.

See that she's decently buried.
I must try to escape from here.

KARI.

Where shall you go?

PEER GYNT.

To the sea-coast.

KARI.

So far!

PEER GYNT.

Aye, and farther still. [*Goes out.*

ACT IV

SCENE I

(SCENE.—*A grove of palm trees, on the south-west coast of Morocco. A dining-table is spread under an awning; rush matting underfoot. Farther back in the grove hammocks are hanging. A steam yacht, flying the Norwegian and American flags, is lying off the shore. A jolly-boat is drawn up on the beach. It is nearly sundown.* PEER GYNT, *now a good-looking middle-aged man, dressed in a neat travelling-suit, with a pair of gold-mounted eyeglasses dangling on his breast, is presiding at table as host to* MR. COTTON, MONSIEUR BALLON, HERR VON EBERKOPF *and* HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE. *The party have just finished a meal.* PEER GYNT *is passing the wine.*)

PEER GYNT.

Drink, gentlemen! If man is meant
For pleasure, let him take his pleasure.
The past's the past—what's done is done—
So we are taught. What may I give you?

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

As host, dear brother Gynt, you're splendid!

PEER GYNT.

The credit's just as much my purse's,
My cook's and steward's——

MR. COTTON.

Very well,
Then here's a health to all the four!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Monsieur, your taste—your *ton*—is such
As nowadays one seldom meets with
Amongst men living *en garçon*—
A certain *je ne sais quoi*——

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

Quite so;
A breath, a gleam, of introspection—
World-citizenship's inspiration;
A glance that pierces clouds, that's free
From any narrow prejudices;
A glimpse of higher criticism;
A simple nature coupled with
A life's experience and thereby
Uplifted to the highest power.
I think that's what you meant—eh, Monsieur?

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Yes, very possibly. In French
It doesn't sound quite so impressive.

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

Of course not. French is somewhat cramped.
But if we want to trace the source
Of this phenomenon——

PEER GYNT.

That's easy;
It's just because I've never married.
Why, gentlemen, the thing's as clear
As daylight. What's a man's first duty?
The answer's brief: To be himself—
To take good care of all that touches
Himself and what is his. But how
Can he do this if his existence
Is that of a pack-camel laden
With someone else's weal and woe?

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

But I dare say you've had to fight
For this self-centred concentration?

PEER GYNT.

Oh yes, I've had to fight for it,
But I have always won the honours;
Though once I very nearly fell
Into a trap, for all my cunning.
I was a wild, good-looking spark,
And let my roving fancy capture
A girl who was of royal blood——

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Of royal blood?

PEER GYNT (*carelessly*).

Or very nearly.
You know——

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE (*thumping on the table*).

These damned aristocrats!

PEER GYNT (*shrugging his shoulders*).

These bogus Highnesses, whose pride
Is to keep off from their escutcheon
The slightest speck of what's plebeian.

MR. COTTON.

And so it came to nothing, then?

MONSIEUR BALLON.

The family opposed the match?

PEER GYNT.

Quite the reverse!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Ah!

PEER GYNT (*discreetly*).

Well, you see,
Things took a turn which made them think
That it was high time we were married.
But, to be candid, the affair
From first to last was most distasteful.
In certain things I'm very dainty,
And also like my independence;
And when her father came and hinted
That he would make it a condition
That I should change my name and status
And lose my own nobility—
With lots of similar conditions
I could not stomach or accept—
I gracefully retired from it,
Refused the father's ultimatum,
And gave my youthful bride her *congé*.
[*Drums on the table with his fingers, and says with a pious air:*
Ah yes, there is a Hand that guides us,
And we poor men can trust to that.
It's very comforting to know it.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

So the affair went by the board?

PEER GYNT.

No, it took on another aspect.
Outsiders meddled in the game
And raised an unexpected pother.
The youngsters of the family
Were much the worst. I had to battle
With seven of them all at once.
I never shall forget that time,
Though I emerged from it the victor.

Some blood was spilt; but still that blood
Sealed my certificate of valour,
And proved what I remarked just now—
That there's a Hand that guides us wisely.

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

You have an outlook upon life
That proves you a philosopher.
For, while an ordinary thinker
Sees every detail separately
And never grasps the whole completely,
Your vision covers all together.
You have a universal standard
To measure life with. Your perceptions,
Like rays of sunlight, emanating
From a great central contemplation,
Pierce every fallacy.—And yet
You say you had no education?

PEER GYNT.

I am, as I've already told you,
A self-taught man in every way.
I've never learnt methodically,
But I have thought and speculated
And read a bit on every subject.
I was not young when I began;
And so, of course, it wasn't easy
To plough the field of knowledge up
And do the thing at all completely.
I've learnt my history in scraps;
For more than that I've had no leisure.
And since, when evil days assail,
A man needs certain things to trust in,
I fitfully absorbed religion;
I found that it assimilated
Much easier if taken that way.
No use to glut one's self with reading,
But to select what may be useful——

MR. COTTON.

Ah, now, that's practical!

PEER GYNT.

Dear friends,
Just think what my career has been.
What was I when I first went westwards?
Quite penniless and empty-handed.
I had to work hard for my food—
No easy job, believe me, often;
But life, my friends, is always sweet,
And death, as we all know, is bitter.
Well! Luck, you see, did not desert me,
And good old Fate was always kindly.
Things moved, and I was always careful,
And so things went from good to better;
And, ten years after that, they called me
The Crœsus of the Charlestown traders;
My name was known in every port
And luck pursued me with my shipping——

MR. COTTON.

What was your trade?

PEER GYNT.

I trafficked most
In negro slaves for Carolina
And idols that were sent to China.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Oh, fie, for shame!

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

Friend Gynt, how could you?

PEER GYNT.

You think my enterprise was passing
Beyond the bounds of what was lawful?

I felt the same thing very keenly;
I found it hateful in the end.
But, once begun, you may believe me
'Twas difficult enough to end it.
In any case, so big a business
Affected others by the thousand;
To break it off too suddenly
Would have, of course, been most disastrous.
I never like to break things off;
But all the same, I must admit
I've always fully been alive
To what you'd call the consequences;
And, when I've overstepped the bounds,
It's always made me feel uneasy.
Besides, I wasn't growing younger.
By that time I was nearly fifty,
And by degrees my hair was greying;
And, though my health was always perfect,
Thoughts such as this cropped up to plague me:
" Who knows how short the time may be
Before the Great Assize is summoned
And sheep from goats are separated? "
What could I do? To cease my trade
With China was impossible.
I found a way. I opened up
A second traffic to those waters;
And, though each spring I sent to China
Shiploads of idols, every autumn
I sent out Missionaries furnished
With everything that could be needful
To work conversion—stockings, rum,
Bibles and rice——

MR. COTTON.

All at a profit?

PEER GYNT.

Oh, well, of course.—The plan worked well.
For every idol sold out yonder

There was a duly baptized coolie,
So one thing neutralized the other.
We kept the Missionaries busy,
Because they had to counteract
The idols that we were exporting.

MR. COTTON.

But what about the negro traffic?

PEER GYNT.

Why, there my morals triumphed also.
I felt the trade was scarcely suited
To one whose years were fast increasing;
You never know when death may claim you.
And then there were the thousand pitfalls
Dug by our philanthropic friends,
Besides the chance of being caught
And daily risks from wind and weather.
By taking thought I found a way.
" You'll have to reef your sails, friend Peter,
And see "—so I said to myself—
" How you can best retrieve your error! "
I bought land in a southern state,
And held back my last load of niggers
(Which was of first-class quality)
And settled them on the plantation.
They throve apace, grew fat and sleek,
And they, as well as I, were happy.
Yes, without bragging I may say
I treated them like any father—
And the result was handsome profit.
I built them schools, so as to set
A standard of morality
To be maintained, and saw to it
That it was kept well up to mark.
And then, to make the change complete,
Out of the business I retired,
And sold, with livestock, as it stood,
The whole plantation. When I left,

To all alike, both young and old,
A gratis gift of grog was issued,
And every nigger got a skinful.
The widows, as an extra gift,
Were given snuff. And so I hope—
Unless the Word is merely froth
Which says one's deeds are surely good
If they are not as surely evil—
That all my errors are forgot,
And that perhaps in greater measure
Than in most people's case, my deeds
Will more than balance out my sins.

HERR VON EBERKOPF (*clinking glasses with him*).

How edifying 'tis to hear
A scheme of life worked out so deftly,
Freed from the fog of theories
And undisturbed by outer clamour!

PEER GYNT
(*who during the foregoing conversation has been applying steadily to the bottle*).

We northern men are famous hands
At planning a campaign! The secret
Of life's success is very simple—
Merely to keep one's ears shut tight
To the insidious advances
Of a pernicious reptile.

MR. COTTON.

Aye,
But what's the reptile, my dear friend?

PEER GYNT.

A small one, always tempting men
To take irrevocable steps. [*Drinks again.*
A man can venture without fear,
And keep his courage, if he's careful
Not to get definitely caught
In any of life's cunning pitfalls—

If he looks forward, and beyond
The present moment and its chances,
And always carefully preserves
A bridge behind him to retire on.
That theory has held me up
And always coloured all my conduct—
A theory I inherited
And learnt at home from early childhood.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

You're a Norwegian, I believe?

PEER GYNT.

By birth, yes; but by disposition
I am a citizen of the world.
For the good fortune I've enjoyed,
I have to thank America;
My well-stocked library I owe
To Germany's advanced young thinkers;
From France I get my taste in dress,
My manners, and whatever turn
I have for subtleness of mind;
England has taught me industry
And care for my own interests;
The Jews have taught me how to wait;
From Italy I've caught a dash
Of taste for *dolce far niente*;
And once, when in a sorry fix,
I reached the goal of my desire
By trusting to good Swedish steel.

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE (*lifting his glass*).

Ah, Swedish steel—!

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

Yes, first and foremost
We offer homage to the man
Who is a swordsman.

[*They clink glasses and drink with* PEER GYNT *who is beginning to get heated with wine.*

MR. COTTON.

All you've said
Is excellent; but now, sir, pray
Tell us what you propose to do
With all your wealth.

PEER GYNT (*smiling*).

Do with it, eh?

ALL (*drawing nearer to him*).

Yes, let us hear!

PEER GYNT.

Well, first of all,
To travel; and that's why, you see,
I took you all on board my yacht
As company. I had a mind
To have a choir to worship at
My Altar of the Golden Calf——

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

How witty!

MR. COTTON.

Yes, but no one sails
For the mere pleasure of a journey.
You have an object, without doubt;
What is it?

PEER GYNT.

To be Emperor.

ALL.

What!

PEER GYNT (*nodding his head*).

To be Emperor.

ALL.

But where?

PEER GYNT.

Of the whole world.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

But how, my friend—?

PEER GYNT.

Just simply by the power of gold!
It's not a new idea at all;
It has inspired my every effort.
In boyish dreams I used to travel
Over the sea upon a cloud;
I tried to soar to fancied grandeurs,
And then dropped down on to all-fours;
But to its goal my mind was constant.
Somewhere—I can't remember where—
It says that if a man shall win
The whole wide world, but lose *himself*,
All that he gains is only like
A wreath upon an empty skull.
That's what it says—or something like it—
And, trust me, it is pretty true.

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

But what, then, is the Gyntian Self?

PEER GYNT.

The world which lies within my brain;
Which makes me *me*, and no one else—
No more than God can be the Devil.

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

Now I can see at what you're driving!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Sublime philosopher!

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

Great poet!

PEER GYNT (*with growing exaltation*).

The Gyntian Self!—An army, that,
Of wishes, appetites, desires!
The Gyntian Self! It is a sea
Of fancies, claims and aspirations;
In fact, it's all that swells within
My breast, and makes it come about
That I am I and live as such.
But, just as our Good Lord had need
Of earthly mould to be earth's God,
So I have need of lots of gold
If I'm to be an Emperor.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

But you are rich!

PEER GYNT.

Not rich enough.
Enough, perhaps, for me to pose
For two or three days as a princeling
In some such place as Lippe-Detmold;
But I must be *myself*—complete—
A Gynt fit for the universe—
Sir Peter Gynt from head to heels!

MONSIEUR BALLON (*in transports*).

To purchase all the loveliest things
The world can offer!

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

All the bins
Of century-old Johannisberger!

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

The armoury of Charles the Twelfth!

MR. COTTON.

But, before all, to seize the chance
Of profitable business.

PEER GYNT.

Well,
I've found a way to get them all,
And that is why we're anchored here;
To-night our course will be to northward.
The newspapers I've just received
Have brought me some important news.
[*Rises and lifts his glass.*
It shows that fortune always favours
Those who have confidence to grasp it——

ALL.

Well? Tell us—!

PEER GYNT.

Greece is in an uproar.

ALL (*springing to their feet*).

What, have the Greeks—?

PEER GYNT.

They have revolted.

ALL.

Hurrah!

PEER GYNT.

And Turkey's in a hole.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

To Greece! The way to glory's open!
I'll help them with my sword of France!

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

I with my voice—but at a distance!

MR. COTTON.

I'll get a contract to supply them!

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

Let us away! I'll find at Bender[1]
Charles the Twelfth's famous spur-buckles!

MONSIEUR BALLON
(*falling on* PEER GYNT'S *neck*).

Forgive me, friend, if for a moment
I had misjudged you!

HERR VON EBERKOPF
(*grasping* PEER GYNT *by the hand*).

I'm a fool!
I almost took you for a scoundrel!

MR. COTTON.

That's much too strong—say, rather, for
A simpleton——

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE
(*embracing* PEER GYNT).

And I, dear friend,
Had put you down as an example
Of the worst type of Yankee rascal!
Forgive me!

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

We were all mistaken——

[1] A town in Bessarabia, on the Dniester, where Charles XII. spent his years of exile after his defeat at Pultawa in 1709. The allusion to the spur-buckles is explained as referring to the spurs with which Charles XII. is said in a fit of anger to have torn the garments of the Turkish emissary who brought him the news that the Sultan had concluded a truce with Russia.

PEER GYNT.

What do you mean?

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

We now can glimpse
The banners of the Gyntian army
Of wishes, appetites, desires—!

MONSIEUR BALLON (*admiringly*).

That's what you meant by " being a Gynt "!

HERR VON EBERKOPF (*in the same tone*).

A Gynt that's worthy of all honour!

PEER GYNT.

But tell me—?

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Don't you understand?

PEER GYNT.

I'm hanged if I can take your meaning.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Why, aren't you going to help the Greeks
With money and with ships?

PEER GYNT (*whistling*).

No, thank you!
I'm going to help the stronger side,
And lend my money to the Turks.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Impossible!

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

That's very funny!—
But you of course must have your joke!

[PEER GYNT *is silent for a moment, then leans on a chair and assumes an air of importance.*

PEER GYNT.

Gentlemen, we had better part
Before the last remains of friendship
Dissolve like wreaths of smoke. The man
Who hasn't anything may lightly
Take any chances; those whose all
Is no more than the scrap of earth
They stand on, are the fittest far
For sacrifice and cannon-fodder.
But when a man's well off, as I am,
He risks a greater stake than they.
Pray go to Greece. I'll land you there,
And furnish you with weapons gratis;
The more you fan the flames of strife,
The better it will be for me.
Strike hard for Freedom and the Right!
Attack the Turks and give them hell;
And meet a glorious end upon
A janissary's spear-point.—But,
Excuse me if I don't come with you.
[*Slaps his pockets.*
I've money in my pockets, and
I am Myself—Sir Peter Gynt.

[*Puts up his umbrella and goes into the grove where the hammocks are hanging.*

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

The swine!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

He has no sense of honour!

MR. COTTON.

Oh, honour—let that pass. But think
What splendid profits we could make
If only Greece could free herself——

MONSIEUR BALLON.

I saw myself acclaimed a victor
By crowds of lovely Grecian women!

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

I felt those famous buckles safe
Within my Swedish grasp!

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

I saw
My glorious fatherland's *Kultur*
Spread widely over land and sea——

MR. COTTON.

The actual loss is worst of all.
Goddam![1]—I feel inclined to cry!
I saw myself proprietor
Of Mount Olympus, which contains
(Unless what men have said is false)
Rich veins of copper to be worked;
And the renowned Castalian stream—
Its many waterfalls would yield
A thousand horse-power, easily!

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

I shall go, all the same! My sword
Is worth more, still, than Yankee gold.

MR. COTTON.

Perhaps; but, fighting in the ranks,
We should be merely swamped by numbers.
What profit should we get from that?

[1] So in the original.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Curse it! So near the heights of fortune—
And then to be dashed down again.

MR. COTTON (*shaking his fist at the yacht*).

To think that all this nabob's gold
That he has sweated from his niggers
Is in that ship!

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

An inspiration!
Come on, and let us act! His empire
Shall come to nothing now! Hurrah!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

What will you do?

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

I'll seize his power!
The crew will easily be bought.
On board! I'll commandeer his yacht!

MR. COTTON.

You'll—what?

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

I mean to bag the lot.
[*Goes towards the jolly-boat.*

MR. COTTON.

It's clearly to my interest
To share with you. [*Follows him.*

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

There goes a scamp!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

A proper scoundrel! But—*enfin*!
[*Follows the others.*

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

Well, I suppose I may as well
Go with them—under protest, though!
[*Follows.*

SCENE II

(SCENE.—*Another part of the coast. Moonlight and passing clouds. Out at sea the yacht is seen steaming at full speed.* PEER GYNT *is running along the shore, now pinching himself in the arm, now staring out to sea.*)

PEER GYNT.

It's nightmare!—Illusion!—I soon shall wake up!
It's heading to sea! And at top of its speed!
It's a dream, and I'm sleeping! I'm drunk or I'm mad!
[*Wrings his hands.*
It's impossible that I should perish like this!
[*Tears his hair.*
It's a dream! It *must* be—it *shall* be—a dream!
It's terrible! Ah, but alas it is true!
My scoundrelly friends—! Oh, hear me, Good Lord!
You are Wisdom and Justice—oh, punish them, Lord!
[*Stretches up his arms.*
It is *I*—Peter Gynt! Do look after me, Lord!
Take care of me, Father, or else I shall die!
Make them slacken the engines—or cast off the gig!
Stop the robbers! Make something go wrong with the works!
Do listen! Leave other folk's matters alone!
The world will look after itself while You do.—
He's not listening. He is as deaf as a post!
It's too much! A God that can't think what to do!
[*Beckons up to the sky.*
I say! I've disposed of my negro plantation,
And sent heaps of missionaries out to Asia.

Don't You think that one good turn's deserving another?
Oh, help me to get on the ship—!

[*A sudden glare rises into the sky from the yacht, followed by a thick cloud of smoke. A dull explosion is heard.* PEER GYNT *utters a shriek and sinks down on the sand. The smoke gradually disperses and the yacht is seen to have disappeared.* PEER GYNT *looks up, with a pale face, and says in a low voice:*

'Twas a judgment!
Sunk with all hands in a moment of time!
All thanks to the chances of fortune. [*Emotionally.*
No, no!
There was more than the chances of fortune in this,
That I should be saved while the rest of them perish.
Thanks be to Thee who hast been my protector
And kept an eye on me in spite of my failings!
[*Takes a deep breath.*
What a wonderful feeling of safety and comfort
It gives you to know that you're specially guarded!
But where shall I find meat and drink in the desert?
I don't know, I'm sure. But He will understand.
It *can't* be so dangerous.—
[*In a loud and insinuating voice.*
He will not suffer
Such a poor little sparrow as I am to perish!
I must humble myself—and allow Him some time.
The Lord will provide; I must not be downhearted.—
[*Springs to his feet with a cry of terror.*
Did I hear a lion? That growl in the rushes—?
[*His teeth chatter.*
No, it was no lion. [*Pulls himself together.*
I'm certain it was!
Those creatures, of course, know to keep at a distance;
They dare not take bites at a lord of creation.
They have instinct, of course; it's by instinct they feel
That an elephant's not a safe thing to attack.—
All the same, I will see if I can't find a tree.

Ah, there I see palms and acacias waving,
If I climb one of them, I'll get safety and shelter—
Especially if I can only remember
Some psalms to repeat.— [*Climbs up a tree.*
" Lo, morning and evening
Are different things "—that's a verse that is often
Discussed and examined. [*Settles himself in the tree.*
How pleasant it is
To feel that one's soul is so nobly uplifted!
Thoughts that ennoble are worth more than riches.
I'll trust myself to Him. He knows just how far
I am able to drink of the cup of affliction.
He takes a most fatherly interest in me—
[*Looks out over the sea, and whispers with a sigh:*
But He's not what you'd call economical over it!

Scene III

(Scene.—*A Moroccan camp on the edge of the desert, at night.* Warriors *are resting by a watch-fire.*)

A Slave (*running in and tearing his hair*).
Gone is the Emperor's white charger!

Another Slave
(*running in and rending his garments*).
The Emperor's sacred garb is stolen!

A Chief of the Warriors (*coming in*).
A hundred strokes of the bastinado
To all of you, if the thieves escape!
[*The* Warriors *spring on to their steeds and gallop off in all directions.*

Scene IV

(Scene.—*A clump of palm-trees and acacias. It is dawn.* Peer Gynt, *in a tree, is trying to defend himself with a broken-off branch against a swarm of Apes.*)

Peer Gynt.

I've spent an extremely uncomfortable night.
[*Hits about him.*
Is that them again? The infernal creatures!
They're throwing down fruit. No, it's something else.
Apes are the most disgusting beasts!
It is written that one must watch and fight;
But I can't do it—I'm wearied out.
[*Is disturbed again. Speaks impatiently.*
I must make an end of all this discomfort—
Try and get hold of one of these creatures,
Hang him and flay him and dress myself up
From head to foot in his shaggy hide;
Then the others will think I am one of them.—
We men are but nothing, after all,
And must bow to the force of circumstances.—
Another lot! Why, they swarm like flies!
Away with you! Shoo! They act like madmen.
If only I could get a false tail—
Or something to make me look like a beast——
What's that up there above my head? [*Looks up.*
An old one—his paws chock-full of filth!
[*Crouches down nervously and keeps still for a little. The Ape makes a movement;* Peer Gynt *tries to coax him, as one would a dog.*
Hullo, old man! Is that you up there?
He's a good chap, if you speak to him kindly.
He won't throw things down—will he? No!
It's I! Good dog! We're the best of friends.
Wuff, wuff! Do you hear, I can speak your language?
Old man and I are as good as cousins!
Would he like a nice big bit of sugar—?

The dirty beast! He's thrown the lot
All over me! Disgusting brute!—
Or was it food, perhaps? Its taste
Was unfamiliar, certainly.
But taste is mostly a thing of habit.
What is it that some philosopher
Has said: You must just spit, and trust
To force of habit.—Here's the crowd
Of youngsters now! [*Hits about him.*
This is too much!
That man, who's his Creator's image,
Should have to suffer.—Murder! Help!
The old one's foul, but the youngsters fouler!

Scene V

(Scene.—*A rocky spot overlooking the desert. It is early morning. On one side, a ravine with the entrance to a cave. A* Thief *and a* Receiver of Stolen Goods *are standing in the ravine, with the Emperor's charger and robe. The charger, richly caparisoned, is tied to a rock.* Horsemen *are seen in the distance.*)

Thief.

Spear-points, gleaming
In the sunshine!
See! see!

Receiver.

I hear them galloping
Over the sand!
Woe! Woe!

Thief (*folding his arms on his breast*).

My father thieved;
His son must steal.

Receiver.

My father received;
And so must I.

THIEF.

We must bear our lot,
And be ourselves.

RECEIVER (*listening*).

Footsteps in the thicket!
Away! But where?

THIEF.

The cave is deep
And the Prophet great!

[*They fly, leaving the stolen goods behind them. The* HORSEMEN *disappear in the distance.* PEER GYNT *comes in, whittling a reed.*

PEER GYNT.

Really a most enchanting morning!
The beetles are busy at work in the sand;
Out of their shells the snails are peeping.
Morning! Ah, morning's worth more than gold!
It's strange what a very remarkable power
There is in daylight. In its beams
You feel so safe—your courage waxes—
You're ready to fight wild bulls, if need be.
What silence around me! These rural joys—
It's strange that I never appreciated
These things so much till now. To think
That men live cooped up in great cities,
Just to be pestered and plagued by people.
Look at those lizards, bustling about
Enjoying the air and thinking of nothing.
What innocence in the life of beasts!
They perform the behest of their great Creator,
Their character stamped indelibly on them;
They are *themselves*, whether playing or fighting—
Themselves, as they were when He first said "Be."
[*Puts on his eye-glasses.*
A toad—looking out of a piece of sandstone,
Only his head peeping out of his chamber.

He sits, as if looking out of a window
At the world; to himself he is—enough,
[*Thoughtfully.*
Enough? Where have I read that before?
Most probably in the Great Book I read
As a boy. Or perhaps it was in the Prayer-book?
Or else set down in Solomon's Proverbs?
Dear me—I notice, as years go on,
I cannot remember times and places
As once I used. [*Sits down in the shade.*
Here's a spot that's cool;
I'll sit and rest my bones awhile.
Ah, here are ferns—one can eat the roots.
[*Tastes one.*
It's really food for beasts; but then
The Book says we must subdue our natures,
And, further, that pride must be abased.
"Who humbleth himself, shall be exalted." [*Uneasily.*
Exalted? Of course that will happen to me—
The contrary's quite unthinkable.
Fate surely will help me away from here
And set my feet on the road to fortune.
This is but a test; if the Lord will grant me
Strength to endure, I'll be rescued later.
[*Shakes off such thoughts, lights a cigar, stretches himself out and gazes over the desert.*
What an enormous, boundless waste!—
Far off, there, I can see an ostrich.—
It is hard to perceive the Almighty's purpose
In all this dead and empty desert,
Where there is nothing that is life-giving;
A burnt-up waste that profits no one,
This bit of the world that's for ever sterile;
A corpse that never, since it was shaped,
Has brought its Creator anything—
Not even thanks. Why was it made?
Nature is ever extravagant.—
Is that the sea that glitters yonder,
Away in the east? No—only mirage.
The sea's to the west, where, like a dam,

Sandhills protect the desert from it.
[*An idea strikes him.*
A dam! Then I might—! The hills are low.
A dam! Then a cutting—a canal—
And through the gap the rushing waters
Would fill the desert with a life-flood,
And all this empty burnt-up grave
Become a fresh and rippling ocean!
Islands would show in it where now
There are oases; to the north,
Atlas would fringe the shore with verdure;
And to the south, like heedless birds,
White sails would skim along, where now
The caravans plod painfully;
A lively breeze would dissipate
This stuffy air, and from the clouds
A gentle dew would fall. In time
Town after town would be established,
And grass grow round the swaying palm-trees.
The country beyond the Sahara's edge,
Away in the south, would become a land
Of busy trade and seamen's ventures.
Steam should drive works in Tombuktu,
New colonies arise in Bornu,
And the explorer should be carried
Safe in his waggon through the land
Of Habes [1] to the Upper Nile.
Then in the middle of my sea,
On the most fertile, rich oasis,
I'll settle Norsemen—for the blood
Of dalesmen is the nearest thing
To that of royalty; a cross
With Arab blood will do the rest.
And on a cape with sloping shore
I'll build Peeropolis, the capital!
The old world's out of date; and now
It is the turn of Gyntiana,[2]

[1] The Arabic name for Abyssinia.

[2] The Norwegian violinist Ole Bull had founded, with disastrous financial results, a Norwegian colony of "Oleana" in America on the model approved by the French Socialists.

My new-born land! [*Springs up.*
I only need
Some capital, and the thing is done—
A golden key, and the ocean's gate
Is open! A crusade 'gainst death!
That grisly miser shall disgorge
The hidden treasure that he's hoarding.
There is a world-wide wish for freedom.
Like Noah's donkey in the Ark,
I'll bray my message to the world;
Liberty's baptism I will pour
Over these prisoned shores, till they
Grow lovely in their freedom!—Forward!
In east or west I'll have to seek
The money for the work! My kingdom—
Or half my kingdom—for a horse!
[*The horse in the ravine neighs.*
A horse! And robes! And ornaments!
And weapons! [*Goes nearer.*
It's impossible—
And yet it's true!—I know I've read
Somewhere that faith can move a mountain,
But never thought that it could bring
A horse! I must be dreaming—No,
It is a fact—there stands the horse!
Ab esse ad posse, etcetera.—
[*Puts on the robe and looks himself over.*
Sir Peter—and Turk from head to foot!
Well, truly one can never tell
What's going to happen to one! Come up,
Granë, my steed! [*Climbs into the saddle.*
Gold stirrups, too!
Great folk are known by the steeds they ride!
[*Gallops away across the desert.*

Scene VI

(Scene.—*The tent of an Arab Chieftain, on an oasis.* Peer Gynt, *in his oriental robes, is taking his ease on a divan, drinking coffee and smoking a long pipe.* Anitra *and a troup of* Girls *are dancing and singing to him.*)

Chorus of Girls.

The Prophet is come!
The Prophet, the Lord, the All-Wise One,
To us, to us he has come,
Riding over the sea of sand!
The Prophet, the Lord, the Infallible,
To us, to us he has come,
Sailing over the sea of sand!
Blow flute! Sound drum!
The Prophet, the Prophet is come!

Anitra.

His charger is white as milk
In the streams of Paradise!
Bend the knee! Bow low!
His eyes are stars that flash
And yet are full of love.
No earth-born eyes can meet
The flashing of those stars!
Across the desert he came,
Decked with gold and pearls.
Where he rode it was light;
Behind him all was dark,
Drought and the dread simoom.
The Mighty One has come!
Over the desert he came,
Clothed in mortal shape.
Kaaba is empty now!
Himself has told us so.

CHORUS OF GIRLS.

Blow flute! Sound drum!
The Prophet, the Prophet is come!
[*The girls dance to soft music.*

PEER GYNT.

I have read in a book, and the saying's true,
That no man's a prophet in his own country.—
This life's a deal more to my liking
Than that which I led as a Charlestown trader.
There was something false about it all,
Something foreign to me, and shady;
I never could feel myself at home,
Or feel I had chosen the right profession,
Qu'allais-je faire dans cette galère,
Grubbing about with business matters?
I can't understand it, the more I try—
It simply happened, and that is all.
To climb up the world on money-bags
Is just like building a house on sand.
If you wear rings and a watch and so forth,
People will curtsey and bow to you,
Take off their hats if you wear a breast-pin;
But the rings and the pin are not yourself.
Now a Prophet—he has a definite status;
You know exactly where you're standing,
If a man salutes you, it's for *yourself*,
And not because of your pounds and shillings.
You are what you are, without pretence.
Owing nothing to chance or accident,
Independent of patents or concessions.
A Prophet—yes, that's the life for me.
And it happened so unexpectedly—
Simply from riding across the desert
And coming upon these children of nature.
The Prophet had come; it was clear to them.
But indeed it was not my design to deceive them—
An official reply from a Prophet is one thing,
And a lie quite another; in any case, too,

I can always retire from my present position.
I'm in no way bound; so it's not so bad.
It's all, so to speak, like a private arrangement.
I can go as I came; my steed's standing ready;
In short, I am master of the situation.

ANITRA (*at the door of the tent*).
Prophet and Master!

PEER GYNT.
What is it, my slave?

ANITRA.
At the door of the tent stand sons of the desert,
Craving to look on the face of the Prophet——

PEER GYNT.
Stop! You can tell them they must keep their distance;
I will receive their petitions at a distance.
Tell them no man may set his foot within here!
Menfolk, my child, are but a set of scoundrels—
They are, in fact, a filthy lot of rascals.
You, my Anitra, cannot well imagine
With what barefaced impertinence they cheat one—
H'm!—I should say, how grievously they sin. Now,
No more of that! Come, dance for me, my children!
I would forget these thoughts that make me angry.

THE GIRLS (*as they dance*).
The Prophet is good! His heart is distressed
For the sins that the sons of earth have committed.
The Prophet is kind! All praise to his kindness
Which leads such poor sinners to Paradise!

PEER GYNT
(*whose eyes have followed* ANITRA *through the dance*).
Her legs flit about like nimble drumsticks!
She's really a tasty morsel, the baggage!

It's true her figure's pronounced in some ways—
Not quite in accord with the standards of beauty;
But what is beauty? A mere convention,
A currency coined for a special purpose.
And it's just these extravagances that tickle
A palate that's sated with what is normal.
In marriage there's always something wanting;
She's either too fat or else too scraggy,
Annoyingly young or alarmingly ancient;
And if she's between the two, she's insipid.—
Her feet, it is true, might well be cleaner,
Also her arms—especially that one.
But, after all, that's nothing to matter;
One might rather call it a qualification.—
Anitra, come here!

ANITRA.

Thy slave, my Master!

PEER GYNT.

You attract me, child! The Prophet is moved.
If you don't believe me, I'll prove it to you—
I'll make you a Houri in Paradise!

ANITRA.

Impossible, Master!

PEER GYNT.

You don't believe me?
As I am alive, I'm in real earnest!

ANITRA.

But I've no soul!

PEER GYNT.

Then you shall have one!

ANITRA.

How shall I, Master?

PEER GYNT.

That's my affair.
I shall look after your education.
No soul? It's true you are pretty stupid;
I've noticed that fact with some regret;
But there's room enough in you for a soul.
Come here! Let me measure your head. Oh, yes,
There's plenty of room, as I knew there was.
True enough, you'll never be anything much;
A great soul will be quite beyond you.
But, pshaw! it really doesn't matter;
You'll have enough to prevent your feeling
Ashamed of it——

ANITRA.

My Lord is kind——

PEER GYNT.

You're hesitating? What is the matter?

ANITRA.

I'd rather have——

PEER GYNT.

Speak out, at once!

ANITRA.

I don't care so much about having a soul;
I'd rather have——

PEER GYNT.

What?

ANITRA (*pointing to his turban*).

That lovely opal!

PEER GYNT (*in raptures, as he hands her the jewel*).

Anitra, you're one of Eve's true daughters!
Your charm attracts me—for I'm a man;
And, as a noted writer puts it:
"*Das ewig weibliche ziehet uns an.*"

SCENE VII

(SCENE.—*A grove of palm-trees outside* ANITRA'S *tent. The moon is shining.* PEER GYNT, *with an Arabian lute in his hands, is sitting under a tree. His beard and hair have been trimmed, which makes him look considerably younger.*)

PEER GYNT (*plays and sings*).

I locked the gate of Paradise
And took away the key.
My bark afar the north wind bore,
While lovely women on the shore
Were weeping there for me.

Southward I sailed the salty depths
Before the die was cast;
Where palms were waving proud and free
Around an inlet of the sea,
I burned my ship at last.

A desert-ship I mounted then—
A four-legged ship, I trow—
To bear me o'er the desert dark.
I am a bird of passage! Hark!
I'm twittering on a bough!

Anitra, thou art like the wine
Of palm-trees, sparkling clear!
Angora-goats'-milk cheese is good,
But it's not half so sweet a food
As thou, Anitra dear!

[*Slings the lute over his shoulder and approaches the tent.*

All is silent! Now I wonder
If she heard my little song?
Is she there behind the curtain,
Peeping out with nothing on?
What's that sound? It's like a bottle
Someone is uncorking!—There!
There again I heard it!—Is it
Sighs of love?—a lover's song?—
No, it's clearly someone snoring.
Lovely sound! Anitra sleeps!
Nightingales, desist from singing!
You shall suffer if you dare
With your silly cluck and gurgle—.
Oh, well, after all—sing on!
Every nightingale's a songster,
Just as I am one myself;
With their notes, like me, they capture
Tender, delicate young hearts.
Night's cool hours are meant for singing;
Singing is our common sphere;
Singing is the art of being
Us—Peer Gynt and nightingale.
And to hear Anitra sleeping
Is the topmost bliss of love;
It's like lifting up a goblet
To the lips, but drinking naught.—
Oh, but here she comes! Well, really,
After all that is the best.

ANITRA (*at her tent door*).

Did I hear my Master calling?

PEER GYNT.

Yes, my dear, the Prophet called.
I was wakened by a hubbub;
Cats were fighting all around——

ANITRA.

Ah, they were not fighting, Master.
It was something worse than that.

PEER GYNT.

What was it?

ANITRA.

Oh, spare me!

PEER GYNT.

Tell me!

ANITRA.

I am blushing!

PEER GYNT (*going close to her*).

Do you mean
The emotion I was feeling
When you had my opal, dear?

ANITRA (*horrified*).

Don't compare yourself, great Master,
To an old disgusting cat!

PEER GYNT.

Child—considered just as lovers,
There's perhaps not much to choose
'Twixt a tom-cat and a Prophet.

ANITRA.

Honeyed jests, great Master, fall
From your lips.

PEER GYNT.

My little friend,
You, like other girls, pass judgment
Solely by a great man's looks.
I am really very playful—
Especially when *tête-à-tête*.
My position makes it needful
For me to put on a mask

Of most serious behaviour;
I'm constrained by daily duties,
And the nature of the business
Relative to my great office,
To assume a weighty manner,
And at times may seem to others
Too prophetically abrupt;
But 'tis all upon the surface.—
Away with all that bosh! In private
I am Peer—that's who I am.
Come, now, I will drop the Prophet;
You shall know my very self!

[*Sits down under a tree and draws* ANITRA *closer to him.*

Come, Anitra, let us dally
Underneath this waving palm!
You shall smile and I shall whisper
Nothings in your ear; and then
We'll reverse the parts we're playing,
Your sweet lips shall whisper love
In my ear while I sit smiling!

ANITRA (*lying at his feet*).

All you say is sweet as music,
Though I don't quite understand.
Tell me, Master, can your daughter
Get a soul by listening?

PEER GYNT.

Presently you shall be dowered
With that light of life—a soul;
When upon the rosy portals
Of the dawn we see in gold
" I am daybreak " clearly written,—
Then it will be time enough
To begin your education.
But for me to play schoolmaster,
And to waste this lovely night
Trying to collect together

Weatherbeaten bits of lore,
Would be stupid altogether,
Even if I wanted to.
And, besides, considered rightly,
Souls are not the chiefest things
In our lives; it's hearts that matter.

ANITRA.

Speak on, Master! When you speak,
It's like opals flashing fire.

PEER GYNT.

Too much cleverness is folly;
And the fruit of cowardice
Pushed too far, is cruelty.
Truth, if it's exaggerated,
Is no more than wisdom's self
Turned hind-foremost.—Yes, my child,
You may take my word for it,
There are people in the world
Gorged with soul but dull of vision.
I once knew a chap like that;
He seemed brighter than his fellows;
Yet he let resounding phrases
Which he did not understand
Quite mislead him from his business.—
Look around this fair oasis,
At the desert; if my turban
I took off and fluttered gently
Once or twice, the mighty ocean
At my bidding would invade it,
Filling up its every corner.
But I'd be a silly cuckoo
If I set about creating
Seas and continents. Do you know,
My child, what life is?

ANITRA.

No, instruct me.

PEER GYNT.

Life means passing safe and dry-shod
Down the rushing stream of time.
Manly strength is what is needed
To be what I am, my dear.
Age makes eagles lose their feathers,
Makes old fogies' footsteps fail,
Sets an old crone's teeth decaying,
Gives an old man withered hands,—
And they all get withered souls.
Give me youth! I mean as Sultan,
Ardent and vigorous, to rule—
Not the realms of Gyntiana
With their palm-trees and their vines-
But the realm of fresh young beauty
That lies in a maiden's thoughts.
So you see, my child, the reason
Why I graciously was pleased
To bestow my love upon you;
Why I chose your little heart,
So to speak, to be the empire
That shall be my caliphate.
None but I shall know your longings;
In the empire of my love
I must reign supreme, unquestioned!
For you must be mine alone.
I shall be your gentle gaoler,
Binding you with gold and gems.
If we part, life will be empty—
Or, at any rate, for you!
Not a fibre of your being,
Not an instinct of your will,
But shall know me as their master—
You shall be so filled with me.
And your raven locks—your beauty—
All in you that can allure—
These shall be a pleasant garden
For your Sultan's foot to tread.
And that's why it's really lucky

You've an empty little head.
Souls are apt to make their owners
Too absorbed about themselves.
And—while we're upon the topic—
If you like, I'll seal the pact
By bestowing on your ankle
This fine bangle. That, I think,
Fairly meets the situation.
Me—instead of soul—you'll have;
Otherwise, the *status quo.* [ANITRA *snores.*
What? Is she sleeping? Have my words
Fallen on unheeding ears?
No; it shows the power lying
In my words—that, like a stream,
They transport her gently with them
To the land of dreams.
[*Gets up and puts some jewels in her lap.*
Anitra!
Here are jewels! Here are more!
Sleep, Anitra! Dream of Peer!
Sleep, for in your sleep you've set
A crown upon your Emperor's head!
Peer Gynt has won a victory
Of personality to-night.

SCENE VIII

(SCENE.—*A caravan route. The oasis is visible in the remote background.* PEER GYNT, *on his white horse, is galloping over the desert, holding* ANITRA *before him on the pommel of his saddle.*)

ANITRA.
Let go! I'll bite you!

PEER GYNT.
You little rogue!

ANITRA.

What do you want to do?

PEER GYNT.

To play
At dove and falcon! To carry you off,
And do all sorts of reckless things!

ANITRA.

For shame! An old Prophet, too!

PEER GYNT.

Oh, bosh!
The Prophet is not old, you goose!
Do you think this looks as if he were old?

ANITRA.

Let me go! I want to go home!

PEER GYNT.

You flirt!
Home! To father-in-law! That's good!
We birds that have flown out of our cage
Dare not be seen by him again.
Besides, my child, no one should stay
Too long in the same place; he's apt
To lose as much in estimation
As he can gain by making friends;
And this is specially the case
When he's a Prophet, or the like.
His should be flying visits—seen
As snatches of a song are heard.
It was time that my visit should come to an end;
These sons of the desert are shifty creatures,—
Incense and gifts have both been lacking
For some days.

ANITRA.

Yes, but *are* you a Prophet?

PEER GYNT.

I am your Emperor!
[*Tries to kiss her, but she draws back.*
Oh, come!
Don't be a proud little birdie, now!

ANITRA.

Give me the ring that's on your finger.

PEER GYNT.

Take the lot if you wish, dear!

ANITRA.

Your words are like life-giving music!

PEER GYNT.

What happiness 'tis to be loved like this!
Let me dismount! I will lead the horse
And be your slave!
[*Hands her the whip and dismounts.*
See now, my pretty,
My beautiful rose—here am I now,
And here I'll tread the sands until
I get a sunstroke and have to stop.
I am young, Anitra! Remember that!
You mustn't look at my deeds too closely;
Jokes and fun are what youth is known by!
And, if you were not quite so stupid,
My graceful flower, you'd understand
That, since your lover is full of fun,
Ergo he's young!

ANITRA.

Yes, you are young.
Have you any more rings?

PEER GYNT.

Of course I'm young!
Look, I am bounding like a deer!

If there was any green-stuff handy,
I'd make myself a wreath! Aha!
Of course I'm young! Just see me dance!
[*Dances and sings.*
I am a happy little cock!
Peck me, my little pullet!
Houp-là! Just see me foot it!
I am a happy little cock!

ANITRA.

You're sweating, my Prophet; I'm afraid you will melt.
Let me carry that bag that weighs down on your belt.

PEER GYNT.

What tender concern! You shall carry the purse;
Hearts that are loving have no need of gold!
[*Dances and sings again.*
He is a madcap, your little Peer!
He doesn't know what he is doing!
And doesn't care—if he keeps going!
He is a madcap, your little Peer!

ANITRA.

How joyful 'tis to see the Prophet dancing!

PEER GYNT.

Oh, drop that " Prophet " nonsense! Let's put on
Each other's clothes! Come on! You take yours off!

ANITRA.

Your caftan is too long, your belt too roomy,
Your stockings much too small.

PEER GYNT.

Eh bien![1] Instead,
Inflict some pain upon me; for 'tis sweet

[1] So in the original.

For loving hearts to suffer for their love!
And, when we come to where my castle stands——

ANITRA.

Your Paradise? Have we got far to ride?

PEER GYNT.

A thousand miles or so!

ANITRA.

Oh, what a way!

PEER GYNT.

Then you shall have the soul I promised you——

ANITRA.

No, thanks; I think I'll do without the soul.
But you were asking for some pain——

PEER GYNT.

Ah, yes!
Something severe but brief—a passing pang—!

ANITRA.

Anitra must obey the Prophet! So—
Farewell!

[*Hits him smartly over the fingers with the whip, and gallops back over the desert at full speed.*

PEER GYNT

(*after standing for a long time as if thunderstruck*).

Well, I am—!

Scene IX

(Scene.—*The same as the preceding, an hour later.* Peer Gynt *is taking off his Turkish dress bit by bit, deliberately and thoughtfully. When he has finished, he takes a travelling-cap out of his coat pocket, puts it on, and stands once more in European dress. He flings the turban far away from him.*)

Peer Gynt.

There lies the Turk, and here stand I!
A pagan existence is no good at all.
It's lucky that I can throw it away
With the clothes, and that it's not bred in the bone.
Qu'allais-je faire dans cette galère?
It's certainly best to live as a Christian,
Avoid the temptation of sumptuous garments,
Fashion your life by what's lawful and moral;
In fact, be yourself—and deserve at the last
A funeral oration and wreaths on your coffin.
[*Takes a few steps.*
The baggage!—Only a little more,
And I believe she'd have turned my head.
But I'll be hanged if I understand
What it was in her that so upset me.
I am well out of it! If the joke
Had been pursued a little farther,
It would have made me ridiculous.—
I have erred, no doubt; but it's comforting
To feel that my erring was the result
Of the position I had assumed;
It was not I, myself, that erred.
It was, as a fact, the prophetic life—
Devoid of any savouring salt
Of active work—that caused in me
These lapses into want of taste.
It's a sorry business being a Prophet!
In the course of your duties you're apt to get heedless.

You're sober and dignified; all of a sudden
You find you're nothing of the sort.
I certainly gave proof of it
By paying homage to that goose,
Still, all the same— [*Bursts out laughing.*
Just think of it!
Spending the time in wanton dancing!
Trying to stem the stream of life
By fooling like that!—sweet music,
Caresses, sighs—and in the end
Be plucked like any silly hen!
Prophetically wild behaviour!—
Plucked!—To my shame, I've been plucked badly!
Still, I've a little left in hand,—
Some in America, and some
Safe in my pocket; so I'm not
Quite on the rocks. And, after all,
A moderate amount of wealth
Is best. I am no longer tied
By horses, coachmen and the like;
I've neither carriages nor luggage
To give me trouble. In a word,
I'm master of the situation.—
Which way shall I choose? Many are open.
It's in such choice that wisdom counts.
My business life is a finished chapter;
My love affairs, discarded garments;
And I have no mind to retrace my steps.
" Forward or back it's just as far;
Out or in, it's just as narrow "—
As I think it says in some clever book.
I must find some new, some ennobling task;
An object that's worth my pains and money.
Suppose I wrote, without concealment,
The story of my life—a book
To serve as a guide and an example
To others after me? Or, wait—!
I've lots of time at my command—
Suppose I become a travelling scholar,
Making a study of bygone ages?

That, I believe, is the thing for me!
I'd always a fancy for history,
And lately I've improved my knowledge.
I'll trace the story of mankind!
Float like a feather upon the stream
Of history; and live again,
As in a dream, the days of old;
See the fierce fights the heroes waged—
But from a vantage-point that's safe,
That of an onlooker; see how
Thinkers were slaughtered, martyrs bled;
How kingdoms rose and kingdoms fell;
Watch epochs of world-history
Grow from their birth; and, in a word,
Skim all the cream of history.—
I must try and get hold of a book of Becker's,[1]
And go chronologically about it.
It's true that my previous knowledge is sketchy,
And history's rather an intricate matter,—
But what is the odds! It frequently happens
That very unusual methods of starting
Lead to the most original outcome.—
To see one's goal and drive towards it,
Steeling one's heart, is most uplifting!
[*With restrained emotion.*
Breaking through every bond that hinders,
Sundering ties of home and friendship,
Bidding adieu to love's soft promptings,
To solve the mystery of truth!
[*Wipes a tear from his eye.*
That is the test of a real enquirer!
It makes me happy beyond measure
To feel I have solved the great enigma
Of my destiny. I've only, now,
To hold my course through thick and thin!
I think I may be well forgiven
If I feel proud, and call Peer Gynt
A Man, and Manhood's Emperor!

[1] Becker's *Weltgeschichte*, which had been translated into Danish.

The Past shall be a lock to which
I have the key; I will desert
The sordid paths of modern life.
The Present is not worth a shoe-lace.
The ways of men are empty, faithless;
Their minds are dull, their deeds are futile—
[*Shrugs his shoulders.*
And women—well, their name is frailty!
[*Moves on.*

Scene X

(Scene.—*Outside a hut in a forest in the far north of Norway. It is a summer's day. The door, which stands open, is furnished with a massive wooden bolt; above the door a pair of reindeer horns is fixed. A herd of goats are feeding by the wall.* Solveig, *now a fair and handsome middle-aged woman, is sitting spinning in the sunshine.*)

Solveig (*looks down the path and sings*).

It may not be till winter's past,
And spring and summer—the whole long year;
But I know that you will come at last,
And I shall wait, for I promised you, dear.
[*Calls to her goats, then resumes her spinning and singing.*
God guard you, dear, where'er you be!
If in Heaven, God have you in His care!
I shall wait till you come back to me;
If you're waiting above, I shall meet you there!

Scene XI

(Scene.—*In Egypt, at the foot of the statue of Memnon, at dawn.* Peer Gynt *comes walking along, stops, and looks around him.*)

Peer Gynt.

I think that this place will do for a start.—
Now, for a change, I'm an Egyptian;

But Egyptian always upon the basis
Of the Gyntian Self. I'll wander later
Into Assyria. I'll stop short
Of going back to the Creation,
For that would only lead to danger.
I'll skirt the edges of Bible history.
No doubt I'll discover certain traces
That will confirm it; but to go
Minutely into it is not
According to my plan of action.
[*Sits down on a stone.*
I'll rest awhile and wait with patience
Until I've heard the Statue singing
Its customary morning song;
And, after I have had my breakfast,
I'll climb the Pyramid, and then,
If I have time I'll look inside it.
Then to the Red Sea, where perhaps
I shall discover King Potiphar's grave.
Then I will be an Asiatic;
In Babylon I'll seek the famous
Hanging Gardens and Concubines—
The fairest products, that's to say,
Of civilization. Then a leap,
And I'll be at the walls of Troy;
And thence the sea-route is direct
To beautiful old Athens. There,
I shall examine, stone by stone,
The pass Leonidas defended;
I'll make myself familiar
With all the best philosophies;
Find out the gaol where Socrates
Laid down his life as sacrifice—
But, stop a minute, I forgot—!
Greece is at war, so for the present
I must put Hellenism aside. [*Looks at his watch.*
What a ridiculous time the sun
Takes in rising! My time's precious.
Well, then,—from Troy—that's where I'd got to—
[*Gets up and listens.*

I wonder what that curious murmur—?
[*The sun rises.*

THE MEMNON STATUE (*singing*).

From the demi-god's ashes [1] arise new-born
Singing birds.
Zeus, the all-knowing,
Shaped them for conflict.
Owl of Wisdom,
Where sleep my birds?
You must die if you read not
The Riddle of the Song!

PEER GYNT.

I really do believe I heard
Sounds from the Statue! That would be
The music of the past. I heard
The rise and fall of the Statue's voice.
I'll note that down for consideration
At experts' hands.
[*Makes a note in his pocket-book.*
" The Statue sang.
I heard the sounds quite plainly, but
Could not completely understand
The words. I have, of course, no doubt
The whole thing was hallucination.
Otherwise, I have not observed
Anything of importance so far." [*He moves on*

[1] At Memnon's death, Jove changed the hero's companions into birds that sang wildly and fought fiercely with each other. Ibsen's satire here is said to be directed against the University Professors of Norway, the Owl of Wisdom being the crest of the University. He regarded the professorial wisdom as a dead thing, insomuch as it merely concerned itself with the past and took no proper part in the conflict for the future of Norway. The Statue here asks Peer, as the representative of the Norwegian people, where the fighting spirit that should have arisen from the ashes of the past is sleeping.

Scene XII

(Scene.—*Near the village of Gizeh, by the great Sphinx carved out of the rock. In the distance are seen the spires and minarets of Cairo.* Peer Gynt *arrives; he examines the Sphinx carefully, sometimes through his eye-glass, sometimes through the hollow of his hand.*)

Peer Gynt.

Now where in the world have I met before
Something I only half remember
That this ugly thing reminds me of?
For met it I have—either north or south.
Was it a man? And, in that case, who?
The Memnon Statue reminded me
Of the Troll King of our fairy tales,
Sitting like that, all stiff and rigid,
Resting his rump on a piece of rock;
But this remarkable mongrel here,
This monster, half lion and half woman—
Have I known it, too, in a fairy tale?
Or have I some real recollection of it?
A fairy tale?—No, I know the chap!
It's the Boyg, if you please, whose skull I cracked—
I mean to say that I dreamt I did,
For I was lying ill of a fever.
[*Goes nearer to the Sphinx.*
The selfsame eyes, the selfsame lips!
Not quite so sluggish—a bit more cunning—
But in the main points just the same.
Well, Boyg, old fellow, you're like a lion,
Seen from behind and in the daylight!
Are you still full of riddles? We'll try, and see;
We'll see if you answer as you did before.
[*Calls to the Sphinx.*
Hi, Boyg! Who are you?

VOICE (*from behind the Sphinx*).

Ach, Sfinx, wer bist du?

PEER GYNT.

What's that? An echo in German? Astounding!

VOICE.

Wer bist du?

PEER GYNT.

It's got a perfect accent!
The observation's new, and my own.
[*Makes a note in his book.*
"Echo in German—with Berlin accent."
[BEGRIFFENFELDT *comes from behind the Sphinx.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

A man!

PEER GYNT.

Oh—it was *he* that was talking.
[*Makes a further note.*
"Came later to another conclusion."

BEGRIFFENFELDT
(*with signs of great excitement*).

Excuse me, Sir—! A vital question—!
What was it brought you here to-day?

PEER GYNT.

A visit. I'm greeting a friend of my youth.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

The Sphinx?

PEER GYNT.

Yes, I knew him in days gone by.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Splendid!—And after the night I've spent!
My forehead is throbbing as if it would burst!—
You know him, Sir? Then speak! What is he?
Can you tell me that?

PEER GYNT.

What is he? Yes,
I can tell you that. He is *himself.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT (*with a start*).

Ha! Like a flash I see the answer
To life's enigma!—Is it certain
That he's himself?

PEER GYNT.

Yes; at least, he said so.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Himself! The great awakening's come!
[*Takes off his hat.*
Your name, sir?

PEER GYNT.

I am called Peer Gynt.

BEGRIFFENFELDT
(*with an air of quiet amazement*).

Peer Gynt! Allegorical! What one expected.
Peer Gynt? That means: the Great Unknown—
The Messiah that was announced to me——

PEER GYNT.

No—really? And you came here to find him—?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Peer Gynt! Profound! Enigmatic! Incisive!
Each word is full of deepest teaching!
What are you?

PEER GYNT (*modestly*).

I have always tried
To be myself. And, for the rest,
My passport——

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Enigmatic too!
All an enigma! [*Grasps him by the hand.*
Come to Cairo!
Come! I have found the Emperor
Of Exegesis!

PEER GYNT.

Emperor?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Come!

PEER GYNT.

Am I really known—?

BEGRIFFENFELDT
(*dragging him away with him*).

The Emperor
Of Exegesis—based on Self!

SCENE XIII

(SCENE.—*In a lunatic asylum at Cairo. A big courtyard surrounded by high walls and buildings with barred windows. Iron cages on the ground level. Three of the* KEEPERS *are in the courtyard. A fourth comes in.*)

FOURTH KEEPER.

I say, Schafmann—where's the Director?

ANOTHER KEEPER.

He went out this morning, long before dawn.

FOURTH KEEPER.

I'm afraid something's happened that has upset him,
Because in the night——

ANOTHER.

Hush! Here he comes!

[BEGRIFFENFELDT *shows* PEER GYNT *in, locks the gate and puts the key in his pocket.*

PEER GYNT (*aside*).

He is a remarkably learned man;
Almost all that he says is beyond understanding.
[*Looks round him.*
So this, then, is your Savants' Club?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Yes, here you'll find them, bag and baggage—
The coterie of seventy
Professors of Exegesis. Lately
A hundred and three new ones joined them.—
[*Calls to the* KEEPERS.
Mikkel, Schlingelberg, Schafmann, Fuchs—
Into the cages with you! Quick!

THE KEEPERS.

We!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Yes—who else? Get on! get on!
As the world's topsy-turvy, we
Must follow suit! [*Shuts them up in the cage.*
The mighty Peer
Has come to us to-day; so you
Can join the others.—I will say
No more.
[*Locks the cage and throws the key into a well.*

PEER GYNT.

But why—my dear Director—?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Don't call me that! I *was* Director
Until—— Sir, can you keep a secret?
I must unburden myself——

PEER GYNT.

What is it?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Promise me that you will not tremble.

PEER GYNT.

I will try not to.

BEGRIFFENFELDT
(*takes him into a corner and whispers*).

Absolute Reason
Expired at eleven o'clock last night!

PEER GYNT.

God help us—!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Yes, it's a great disaster.
In *my* position, too, you see,
It's doubly disagreeable;
Because this place, until it happened,
Was known as a lunatic asylum.

PEER GYNT.

A lunatic asylum!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Ah,
Not *now*, you understand!

PEER GYNT (*aside, growing pale*).

I see
Exactly how it is; this fellow
Is mad—and not a soul suspects it. [*Moves away.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT (*following him*).

I hope you have really understood me?
To say it's dead is not accurate.
It has left itself—got out of its skin
Like my friend Baron Munchausen's fox.[1]

PEER GYNT (*trying to get away*).

Excuse me——

BEGRIFFENFELDT (*holding on to him*).

No, it was like an eel,
Not a fox. A nail right through its eye—
And there it was, squirming on the wall——

PEER GYNT.

How on earth am I to save myself?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Just one slit round the neck—and pop!
Out of its pelt it came!

PEER GYNT.

Quite mad!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

And now the fact is evident
That this same exit-from-itself
Entails a revolution
In all the world. All persons who

[1] "Reynard stood close to a tree. In a twinkling I took out my ball, and placed a good spike-nail in its room, fired, and hit him so cleverly that I nailed his brush fast to the tree. I now went up to him, took out my hanger, gave him a cross cut over the face, laid hold of my whip, and fairly flogged him out of his fine skin."

Up to that time were known as mad
At eleven o'clock last night became
Normal; this, in conformity
With Reason in its newest phase.
And, if you consider the matter farther,
It's clear that from the selfsame hour
Our so-called wise men all went mad.

PEER GYNT.

Speaking of time, my time is precious——

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Your time? You've jogged my memory!
[*Opens a door and calls out.*
Come out! The appointed time has come!
Reason is dead. Long live Peer Gynt!

PEER GYNT.

No, my dear friend—!
[*The mad folk come one after another into the courtyard.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Good morning to you!
Come out and greet the dawn of freedom!
Your Emperor's here!

PEER GYNT.

Their Emperor?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Certainly!

PEER GYNT.

It's too great an honour—
Far more than——

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

No false modesty
At such a time as this!

PEER GYNT.

At least
Give me some respite!—I'm not fit
For such a task; I'm quite dumbfounded!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

The man who guessed the Sphinx's riddle!
Who is himself!

PEER GYNT.

That's just my trouble.
I am myself in every way;
But here, so far as I can see,
Everyone gets outside themselves.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Outside themselves? Oh no, you're wrong.
It's here that men are most themselves—
Themselves and nothing but themselves—
Sailing with outspread sails of self.
Each shuts himself in a cask of self,
The cask stopped with a bung of self
And seasoned in a well of self.
None has a tear for others' woes
Or cares what any other thinks.
We are ourselves in thought and voice—
Ourselves up to the very limit;
And, consequently, if we want
An Emperor, it's very clear
That you're the man.

PEER GYNT.

I wish to goodness—!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Don't be downhearted; everything
That's new, at first seems strange to one.
" One's self "—well, as a specimen,
I'll choose the first that comes to hand.
[*To a gloomy figure that is passing.*
Good morning, Huhu! Still, my lad,
Looking the picture of misery?

HUHU (*a Language-Reformer*[1] *from Malabar*).

What can I do, when generation
After generation dies
Lacking an interpreter? [*To* PEER GYNT.
You're a stranger; will you listen?

PEER GYNT (*bowing*).

By all means.

HUHU.

Then pay attention.—
Away in the East, like a bridal crown,
Lie the shores of Malabar.
Portuguese and Hollanders
Try to civilize the place,
Where there still survive a lot
Of original Malabari.
These good folk have muddled up
Their language, and now rule supreme
In that land. But, long ago,
That same countryside was ruled
By Orang-outangs. The woods
Were all theirs; and they could fight,
Growl and snarl to hearts' content—
Live, in fact, as Nature made them;
They could screech without permission,

[1] The satire in this episode is directed against the " Maalsträvere," as a group of national language-reformers were called, whose aim was to rid the Norwegian language of its Danish taint and get back to the old Norse tongue.

And were lords of all the country.
Then there came this horde of strangers
And disturbed the primal language
That was spoken in the forests.
Now four hundred years have passed—
That means many generations—
And so long a time as that,
As one knows, can easily
Stamp out aborigines.
The forest cries have long been dumb,
Not a growl is ever heard;
If we want to speak our minds,
We must have recourse to words.
It applies to all alike—
Portuguese and Hollanders,
Hybrid races, Malabari—
All are equally affected.
I have tried my best to fight
For our real forest-tongue;
Tried to bring its corpse to life;
Upheld people's right to screech,
Screeched myself, and pointed out
The necessity of screeching
In our folk-songs. But my efforts
Met with no result whatever.—
Now I think you understand
What my grievance is. I thank you
For your courtesy in listening.
If you think you can advise me
What to do, I beg you'll tell me!

PEER GYNT (*aside*).

They say that when you are in Rome
You should do as the Romans do. [*Aloud.*
My friend, if I remember rightly,
There are forests in Morocco
Where there are Orang-outangs
That have neither songs nor teacher;
And their language much resembles
That of Malabar; if you

Were, like many other statesmen,
To expatriate yourself
For the good of these same people,
It would be a noble action
And a fine example also.

HUHU.

Let me thank you, sir, for listening;
I will follow your advice.
[*With an impressive gesture.*
In the east they flout their singer!
The west has its Orang-outangs! [*Goes out.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Now, surely you'll say that *he's* himself!
He's full of himself and nothing else;
Himself in every word he says—
Himself when he's beside himself.
Come here! I want to show you another,
Who's been no less conformable
To Reason since last night's occurrence.
[*To a* FELLAH *who is carrying about a Mummy on his back.*
King Apis, how goes it, my noble sir?

FELLAH (*fiercely, to* PEER GYNT).

Am I King Apis?

PEER GYNT
(*getting behind* BEGRIFFENFELDT).

I'm afraid
I'm not quite qualified to say;
But I should think, if I may judge
From what your voice suggests to me——

FELLAH.

Now you are lying, too!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Your Highness
Must kindly deign to let us have
An explanation.

FELLAH.

Well, I will.
[*Turns to* PEER GYNT.
You see this man I'm carrying?
King Apis was his name.
They call him now a Mummy;
And, what is more, he's dead.
He built up all the Pyramids,
And carved the mighty Sphinx,
And fought—so the Director says—
With Turks on every side.
And therefore the Egyptians
Worshipped him as a God,
And set up in their temples
His statue as a bull.
But *I* am that King Apis—
It's just as clear as day;
If you don't understand it,
I'll make you very soon.
King Apis was out a-hunting,
And got down from his horse,
And stepped aside for a moment
In my grandfather's field.
The soil King Apis fertilized
Has nourished *me* with corn;
And, if more proof is needed,
I have invisible horns.
Then don't you think it's damnable
That I can't get my due?
By my birth I am King Apis,
But only a Fellah here.
If you think you can advise me,
Tell me, without delay,

What I'm to do to make myself
Like Apis, the great king.

PEER GYNT.

Your Highness must build Pyramids
And carve a mighty Sphinx,
And fight—as the Director says—
With Turks on every side.

FELLAH.

Yes, that's a likely story!
A Fellah! A hungry louse!
It's all I can do to keep my hut
Clear of the rats and mice.
Come, think of something better,
To make me great and safe,
And also make me look like
King Apis that's on my back.

PEER GYNT.

Suppose your Highness hanged yourself,
And then, deep in the ground,
Within a coffin's sheltering walls
Behaved like one that's dead——

FELLAH.

I'll do it! Let me have a rope!
To the gallows with my head!
I'll not be quite like him at first,
But time will alter that.
[*Goes away and makes preparations to hang himself.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

A great personality that, my friend—
A man with method——

PEER GYNT.

Yes, so I see.—
But he really *is* hanging himself! God help us!
I feel quite sick—and my brain is turning!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

A transitional stage; it won't last long.

PEER GYNT.

Transition? To what? I really must go——

BEGRIFFENFELDT (*holding him back*).

Are you mad?

PEER GYNT.

Not yet! Mad? God forbid!
[*Amidst an uproar,* HUSSEIN, *a Minister of State, pushes his way through the other lunatics.*

HUSSEIN.

They tell me an Emperor's come to-day.
[*To* PEER GYNT.
Is it you?

PEER GYNT (*desperately*).

They've settled that it is!

HUSSEIN.

Good.—Here are papers that need an answer.

PEER GYNT (*tearing his hair*).

Aha! Go on! The more the merrier!

HUSSEIN.

Perhaps you will honour me with a dip?
[*Bows low.*
I am a pen.

PEER GYNT (*bowing still lower*).

And I am merely
A trumpery imperial parchment.

HUSSEIN.

My history, Sir, is briefly this:
They think me a sand-box, and not a pen.

PEER GYNT.

And mine, Sir Pen, succinctly told:
I'm a paper that's never been written on.

HUSSEIN.

They never will understand what I'm meant for;
They all want to use me to sprinkle sand!

PEER GYNT.

I was a book with silver clasps,
When I belonged to a woman once.
Madness or wisdom is merely a misprint.

HUSSEIN.

But, think—how wretched to be a pen
That never has tasted the edge of a knife!

PEER GYNT (*leaping into the air*).

Think what it is to be a reindeer
That's always jumping down from a height
And never reaching solid ground!

HUSSEIN.

A knife! I am blunt; I need repairing!
The world will perish if I'm not mended!

PEER GYNT.

That would be sad when, like all that He made,
Our Heavenly Father admired it so much.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Here's a knife!

HUSSEIN (*grasping it*).

Ah, how I shall lick up the ink!
How lovely to cut one's self! [*Cuts his throat.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT (*moving to one side*).

Don't splash me!

PEER GYNT (*with growing terror*).

Hold him!

HUSSEIN.

Yes, hold me! That's the word!
Hold! Hold the Pen! Is the paper there—? [*Falls.*
I'm worn out. A postscript—don't forget it:
He was a pen in the hands of others.

PEER GYNT.

What shall I—? What am I? Oh, Thou—keep hold!
I am what Thou wilt—a Turk, a Sinner,
A Troll; only help me! Something has burst
Within me! [*Shrieks.*
I cannot remember Thy name—
Help me, Thou—Guardian of all madmen!
[*Sinks down in a swoon.* BEGRIFFENFELDT, *holding a straw crown in his hand, leaps on to* PEER GYNT *and sits astride of him.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

See how he sits enthroned in the mud!—
He's out of himself! Let us crown him now!
[*Puts the crown on* PEER GYNT'S *head, and shouts:*
Long live the Emperor of Self!

SCHAFMANN (*in the cage*).

Es lebe hoch der grosse Peer!

ACT V

SCENE I

(SCENE.—*On board a ship in the North Sea, off the coast of Norway. Sunset and a threatening sky.* PEER GYNT, *now a vigorous old man with grey hair and beard, is on the poop. His clothes, which are somewhat the worse for wear, are half sailor-like; he wears a pilot-jacket and sea-boots. He looks weather-beaten, and his expression has hardened. The* CAPTAIN *is at the wheel with the* HELMSMAN. *The crew is forward.* PEER GYNT *is leaning his arms on the gunwale and gazing at the land.*)

PEER GYNT.

There's Hallingskarven in winter dress;
He shows up well in the evening light.
And there's his brother Jöklen behind,
Still wearing his ice-green glacier cap;
And, like a lady dressed in white,
Lies Folgefond behind them both.—
Don't try any follies, my ancient friends!
Stay where you are—you are made of stone.

CAPTAIN (*calling forward*).

Two men to the wheel—and hoist the light!

PEER GYNT.

It's blowing.

CAPTAIN.

Aye, we'll have a storm.

PEER GYNT.

Can one see Rondë from the sea?

CAPTAIN.

No—it lies hidden behind Faanen.

PEER GYNT.

Or Blaahö?

CAPTAIN.

No; but, from aloft,
Galdhöpiggen when the weather's clear.

PEER GYNT.

Which way's Harteigen?

CAPTAIN (*pointing*).

Over there.

PEER GYNT.

Of course.

CAPTAIN.

You seem to know the country.

PEER GYNT.

I passed this way when I sailed from home;
And early impressions, as they say,
Last longest.

[*Spits over the side, and continues gazing at the coast.*

It is over there—
Where the hillside glens are blue,
In the dark and narrow valleys,
And along the open fjords—
That is where the people live.

[*Looks at the* CAPTAIN.

Not many houses on this coast.

CAPTAIN.

No, they are few and far between.

PEER GYNT.

Shall we be in by morning?

CAPTAIN.

Aye,
I hope so, if the night is not
Too bad.

PEER GYNT.

It's gathering in the west.

CAPTAIN.

It is.

PEER GYNT.

Oh, by the way, look here—
Remind me, when we're settling up,
That I intend to make a present
To the crew——

CAPTAIN.

You're very good.

PEER GYNT.

It will only be a small one.
I made money, but I've lost it;
Fate and I have fallen out.
You know what I have got on board;
Well, that's the lot. The rest of it
Has taken wings and flown away.

CAPTAIN.

Oh, what you've got is quite enough
To win respect from folk at home.

PEER GYNT.

I have no folk. There's no one waiting
For this rich ugly uncle.—Well,
I shall be spared some fuss at landing.

CAPTAIN.

The storm is brewing.

PEER GYNT.

Now remember,
If any of you need it badly
I'm not close-fisted with my money.

CAPTAIN.

That's kind. They're mostly badly off;
They all have wives and families—
Can scarcely live upon their pay—
And, if your kindness sends them home
With something extra in their pockets,
To-morrow's home-coming will never
Be forgotten.

PEER GYNT.

What's all that?
Do you say they've wives and children?
Married?

CAPTAIN.

Yes, married—all the lot.
The poorest of them all's the Cook;
His house is never free from hunger.

PEER GYNT.

Married? And someone waiting there
To greet them when they come? Is that it?

CAPTAIN.

Of course, like all poor folk.

PEER GYNT.

Supposing
It's evening when they come—what then?

CAPTAIN.

Then I expect that something tasty
Will have been got for the occasion——

PEER GYNT.

A lamp upon the table?

CAPTAIN.

Aye,
And maybe two; a dram to drink——

PEER GYNT.

They'll sit at ease, in warmth and comfort,
With children round them? And such hubbub
In the room that no one hears
Half the other says to them,
Just because they are so happy?

CAPTAIN.

Very likely; and that's why
It's so kind of you to promise
They shall have a little present.

PEER GYNT (*banging his fist on the gunwale*).

No, I'm damned if they shall have it!
Do you think me such a fool
As to fork out for the pleasure
Of helping other people's children?
I've worked too hard to get my money!
No one's waiting for old Peer Gynt.

CAPTAIN.

Just as you please; it's your own money.

PEER GYNT.

Quite so. It's mine and no one else's.
Directly you have cast your anchor
I'll settle up for what I owe you
For my cabin passage hither
From Panama; and then I'll give you
Something for a dram of brandy
For the crew; but not a penny
More than that. You may have leave
To knock me down if I give more!

CAPTAIN.

You'll get my receipt, and nothing else.
Now please excuse me; the storm is rising.
[*He crosses the deck. It has become dark, and the cabin lamps are being lit. The sea grows rougher. Fog and thick clouds gather.*

PEER GYNT.

Provide for a crowd of others' children—?
Fill others' hearts with happiness,
And so be always in their thoughts—?
There's no one wasting thoughts on me.
Lamps on their tables? I'll put them out!
I'll find some way—! I will make them drunk;
Not one of these fellows shall go home sober.
They shall go drunk to their wives and children;
They shall swear—bang loudly on the table—
Frighten their families out of their wits!
Their wives shall scream and run out of the house,
And their children too! I'll spoil their pleasure!
[*The ship rolls heavily; he stumbles, and has difficulty in holding on.*
That was a bad one! The sea's as busy
As if it were paid for what it's doing.
It's the same always, up here in the north;
The sea to fight with, fierce and angry——
[*Listens.*
What was that cry?

THE WATCH (*forward*).

A wreck to leeward!

CAPTAIN (*amidships*).

Starboard the helm! Keep her close to the wind!

HELMSMAN.

Are there men on the wreck?

THE WATCH.

I can make out three.

PEER GYNT.

Lower a boat—!

CAPTAIN.

It would only capsize.

[*Goes forward.*

PEER GYNT.

Who thinks of that? [*To the crew.*

If you're men, you'll save them!
You're surely not afraid of a wetting?

BOATSWAIN.

It's impossible in such a sea as this.

PEER GYNT.

They're calling again! The wind is raging.—
Cook, won't you try? Come on! I'll pay you——

COOK.

Not if you gave me twenty guineas.

PEER GYNT.

You dogs! You cowards! Don't you know
That these are men that have wives and children
Who are waiting—?

BOATSWAIN.

Patience will do them good.

CAPTAIN.

Keep her stern to the breakers!

HELMSMAN.

The wreck's gone under.

PEER GYNT.

Was that sudden silence—?

BOATSWAIN.

If they are married,
As you suggest, then the world's the richer
By three newly-created widows.

[*The storm increases in violence.* PEER GYNT *goes aft.*

PEER GYNT.

There's no more Faith among men any longer—
No more Christianity worth the name;
There's little that's good in their words or their deeds,
And they pay no heed to the Powers Above.
In a storm like to-night's, one may very well
Be afraid of God; these brutes should cower
And remember that, as the saying goes,
It's risky to play with elephants,—
And then they defy Him openly!
I'm guiltless enough; if it comes to judgment,
I can prove that I made an offer to pay them.
But what do I get in return for that?
I know they say that your head lies easy
If your conscience is clear. That may be true
On *terra firma*; but on the sea,
Where an honest man's quite the exception,
I don't consider it worth a rush.
At sea you never can be yourself;
You simply sink or swim with the others;
Should the hour of vengeance chance to strike
For the Cook and the Boatswain, I most likely
Should be swept along to perdition with them;
There's no respect for individuals,—
You're nothing more than one of the crowd.
My mistake has been that I've been too meek,
And get the blame for all that has happened.
If I were younger, I do believe
I'd change my tune and play the boss.
There's time for it yet! It shall get abroad
That Peer has come overseas a winner!
By hook or crook I'll get back the farm;
I'll build on it—it shall look like a castle.

But not a soul shall come into my house!
They shall stand at the door and twiddle their caps,
They shall beg—I'll let them do *that* with pleasure—
But I'll not give them a single farthing;
If I've had to smart from the lash of fortune,
They'll find out that I can hit back again——

[*A* Stranger *is seen standing beside* Peer Gynt *in the gloom, bowing politely to him.*

Stranger.

Good evening!

Peer Gynt.

Good evening! What—? Who are you?

Stranger.

Your fellow-passenger, at your service.

Peer Gynt.

Indeed? I thought I was the only one.

Stranger.

A wrong impression, corrected now.

Peer Gynt.

But it's very strange I have never seen you
Until this evening——

Stranger.

I don't go out
In daytime.

Peer Gynt.

Perhaps you are not well?
You're as white as a sheet——

Stranger.

I'm quite well, thank you.

Peer Gynt.

What a storm!

Stranger.

Yes, what a blessing, man!

PEER GYNT.

A blessing?

STRANGER.

The waves are mountains high.
It makes one's mouth water to think
Of the wrecks that there will be to-night!—
Of the corpses that will be washed ashore.

PEER GYNT.

God forbid!

STRANGER.

Have you ever seen a man
That has been strangled—or hanged—or drowned?

PEER GYNT.

What on earth do you mean?

STRANGER.

There's a grin on their faces;
But the grin is ghastly, and for the most part
They've bitten their tongues.

PEER GYNT.

Do go away!

STRANGER.

Only one question! Suppose, for instance,
That the ship should run aground to-night
And sink——

PEER GYNT.

Then do you think there's danger?

STRANGER.

I really don't know what to answer.
Suppose I'm saved and you get drowned——

PEER GYNT.

Oh, bosh—!

STRANGER.

Well, it's just possible.
With one foot in the grave, a man
Inclines to charitable thoughts——

PEER GYNT (*putting his hand in his pocket*).

I see, it's money that you want!

STRANGER.

No; but if you would be so kind
As to present me with your corpse—?

PEER GYNT.

This is too much!

STRANGER.

Merely your corpse!
It's for a scientific purpose——

PEER GYNT.

Get out!

STRANGER.

But, my dear friend, consider—
The thing would be to your advantage!
I'd have you opened and laid bare.
It really is the seat of dreaming
That I am seeking; but, besides,
I'd have you thoroughly examined——

PEER GYNT.

Get out!

STRANGER.

But, sir—a mere drowned corpse!

PEER GYNT.

Blasphemous man! You encourage the storm!
What folly! In all this wind and rain
And heavy seas and every sign
That some fatality may happen—
Here are you asking for something worse!

STRANGER.

I see that you're not disposed, for the moment,
To carry the matter farther. But time
So very often will alter things. [*Bows politely.*
We shall meet when you're sinking, if not before;
Then, perhaps, you'll be in a better humour.
[*Goes into the cabin.*

PEER GYNT.

Unpleasant fellows, these men of science!
Freethinkers, too——
[*To the* BOATSWAIN *who is passing.*
A word, my friend!
Who is that lunatic passenger?

BOATSWAIN.

I did not know we had any but you.

PEER GYNT.

No other? Why, this gets worse and worse.
[*To a* SAILOR *who comes out of the cabin.*
Who went into the cabin just now?

SAILOR.

The ship's dog, sir! [*Passes on.*

THE WATCH (*calling out*).

Land close ahead!

PEER GYNT.

My trunk! My box! Bring them up on deck!

BOATSWAIN.

We have something else to think about now.

PEER GYNT.

Captain, I wasn't serious
In what I said! I was only joking!
Of course I'm going to help the Cook—!

CAPTAIN.

The jib has gone!

MATE.

There went the foresail!

BOATSWAIN (*calling from forward*).

Breakers ahead!

CAPTAIN.

She'll go to pieces!

[*The ship strikes. Noise and confusion.*

SCENE II

(SCENE.—*Off the coast, amongst rocks and breakers. The ship is sinking. Through the mist, glimpses are caught of a boat with two men in it. A breaking wave fills it; it capsizes; a scream is heard, then all is still for a while. Soon afterwards the boat comes into sight, floating keel uppermost.* PEER GYNT *comes to the surface near the boat.*)

PEER GYNT.

Help! Help! A boat!—Help! I shall sink!
God save me—as the Bible says!

[*Clings tight to the keel of the boat. The* COOK *comes to the surface on the other side of the boat.*

COOK.

Oh, God—for my dear children's sake
Be pitiful! Let me be saved!

[*Holds on to the keel.*

PEER GYNT.

Let go!

COOK.

Let go!

PEER GYNT.

I'll push you off!

COOK.

I'll push *you* off!

PEER GYNT.

I'll kick you off!
Let go your hold! It won't bear two!

COOK.

I know. Get off!

PEER GYNT.

Get off yourself!

COOK.

Not likely!

[*They fight. The* COOK *gets one hand hurt, but clings fast to the boat with the other hand.*

PEER GYNT.

Take your hand away!

COOK.

Be kind! Be merciful!—Just think
Of my young children there at home!

PEER GYNT.

I have more need to live than you,
For I have got no children yet.

COOK.

Let go! You've had your life; I'm young!

PEER GYNT.

Be quick and sink; you're much too heavy.

COOK.

Have mercy! For God's sake let go!
There's no one that will mourn for you——
[*Shrieks and slips down.*
I'm drowning!

PEER GYNT (*catching hold of the* COOK'S *hair*).

No, I've got you tight
By your back hair; repeat "Our Father"!

COOK.

I can't remember—all seems dark——

PEER GYNT.

Say what is most essential! Quick!

COOK.

"Give us this day"——

PEER GYNT.

Oh, skip all that;
You have got all that you will need.

COOK.

"Give us this day"——

PEER GYNT.

The same old song!
It's easy seen you were a cook——
[*His grip gives way.*

COOK (*sinking*).

"Give us this day our"—— [*Goes under.*

PEER GYNT.

Amen, lad!
You were yourself up to the end.
[*Swings himself up on to the keel of the boat.*
Where there is life there's always hope——
[*The* STRANGER *is seen in the water, catching hold of the boat.*

STRANGER.

Good morning!

PEER GYNT.

Eh!

STRANGER.

I heard a cry;
It's funny I should find you here.
Well? Do you see I spoke the truth?

PEER GYNT.

Let go! There's barely room for one!

STRANGER.

I'll swim quite well with my left leg.
I'll float if only I insert
My finger-tip into this crack.
But what about your corpse?

PEER GYNT.

Be quiet!

STRANGER.

The rest is absolutely done for——

PEER GYNT.

Do hold your tongue!

STRANGER.

Just as you wish.
[*Silence.*

PEER GYNT.

Well?

STRANGER.

I am silent.

PEER GYNT.

Devil's tricks!—
What are you doing?

STRANGER.

I am waiting.

PEER GYNT (*tearing his hair*).

I shall go mad! What are you?

STRANGER (*nodding to him*).

Friendly!

PEER GYNT.
Go on! What more?

STRANGER.
What do you think?
Don't you know anyone that's like me?

PEER GYNT.
I know the Devil——

STRANGER (*lowering his voice*).
Is he wont
To light us on the darkest paths
Of life when we're beset by fear?

PEER GYNT.
Oh! So it seems, on explanation,
That you're a messenger of the light?

STRANGER.
Friend, have you known—say, twice a year—
What terror really means?

PEER GYNT.
Of course.
One is afraid when danger threatens;
But your words are ambiguous——

STRANGER.
Well, have you ever, even once,
Triumphed as the result of terror?

PEER GYNT (*looking at him*).
If you have come to guide my steps,
'Twas stupid not to come before.
It's not much good to choose the time
When I'm most likely to be drowned.

STRANGER.
And would your triumph be more likely
If you sat snugly by your fire?

PEER GYNT.

Perhaps not; but your talk was foolish.
How could you think it would affect me?

STRANGER.

Where I come from, they think a smile
Worth quite as much as any pathos.

PEER GYNT.

There is a time for everything.
Things which a publican may do
Are most disgraceful in a bishop.

STRANGER.

The souls of those of bygone days
Whose ashes rest in funeral urns
Aren't always in a solemn humour.

PEER GYNT.

Leave me, you bugbear! Get away!
I won't die! I must get to land!

STRANGER.

As far as that goes, make your mind
Quite easy; no one ever dies
Until he's seen the fifth act through.
[*Disappears.*

PEER GYNT.

Ah, it slipped out of him at last;—
He was a wretched Moralist.

SCENE III

(SCENE.—*A churchyard high up in the mountains. A funeral is going on. The* PRIEST *and the* MOURNERS *are just finishing the last verse of a hymn.* PEER GYNT *is passing on the road, and stops at the churchyard gate.*)

PEER GYNT.

Here's another man going the way of all flesh.
Well, God be praised that it isn't me!
[*Goes into the churchyard.*

PRIEST.

Now that his soul has gone to meet its God,
And this poor dust waits like an empty husk,—
Let us, dear friends, in a few words recall
The dead man's journey on this earth of ours.
He wasn't rich, nor was he very clever;
His voice was weak, his bearing scarcely manly;
He had no strength of mind, nor much decision;
Nor in his own home did he seem the master.
His manner when he came to church was such
As if he felt he must request permission
To take his seat among the congregation.
Of Gudbrandsdal he was, you know, a native,
And he was scarce a boy when he came hither;
And, to the last, as you no doubt have noticed,
He always kept his right hand in his pocket.
That same peculiarity I mention
Was probably the only thing that stamped
His picture on our minds; that, and the shyness—
The almost shamefaced diffidence—with which
He bore himself when he came in amongst us.
But, though he was so diffident and quiet,
And to the last was almost like a stranger,
You know quite well, in spite of his concealment,
The hand he hid had no more than four fingers.—
I well remember, many years ago,
During the war, one morning a Conscription
Was held at Lundë. Everyone was full
Of Norway's troubles and her doubtful future.
Behind a table, I remember, sat
A Captain and the Mayor, and several Sergeants;
And one by one our lads came in, were measured,
Enrolled, and duly sworn in to the army.
The room was full; and outside in the courtyard
Was heard the noise of the young people's laughter.
A name was called out, and a lad came in
With face as white as snow upon the hilltops.
They told him to come forward to the table.
His right hand was all swathed up in a napkin;

He gasped and swallowed—tried to find his voice—
But seemed as if he had no words to answer
The Captain's questions. Still, at last, he did;
And then, with crimson face and faltering tongue
That sometimes let the words out with a rush,
He mumbled some tale of an accident—
A reaping-hook that slipped and cut his finger
Clean off his hand. There was a sudden silence.
Men exchanged glances; lips were curled in scorn;
Looks of disdain were flashed upon the lad,
Who stood there staring with unseeing eyes;
He felt their scorn although he did not see it.
And then the Captain, an old grey-haired man,
Stood up, and spat, and pointed to the door
And said: "Begone!"—and so the lad went out.
Those in the room divided to make way,
So that he ran the gauntlet of them all.
He reached the door, and then took to his heels;
Ran up the hillside—through the woods and pastures,
Up over rocks and stones, stumbling and slipping—
To where his home was, far up in the mountains.

'Twas six months after that when he came hither,
Bringing his mother, children and betrothed.
He leased some land upon the mountain-side
Near to where Lomb is bounded by the moor.
As soon as it was possible, he married
The mother of his children; built a house;
Broke up the stony ground with such success
That yellow grain in patches soon appeared
Amidst the rocks. It's true that when he went
To church he kept his right hand in his pocket;
But on his farm I know he worked as well
With nine fingers as others with their ten.—
Then, one wet spring, a flood swept all away.

They saved their lives, but nothing else; and, poor
And naked as he was, he set to work
To clear the soil afresh; and by the autumn
He'd built himself a house on safer ground.
Safer? Yes, from the flood but not the mountains.
For, two years later, in an avalanche

All that he had was overwhelmed again.
But even avalanches had no power
To daunt his soul. He set to work to dig
And clear the snow and save what might be left;
And, ere the winter's snow had come again,
He'd built his little house a third time up.
Three sons he had—three fine young lads—and they
Must go to school, and school was far away;
And so, from where the public roadway ended,
He had to cut a steep and narrow path
Through the hard snow. And then—what did he do?
The eldest boy had to climb up and scramble
As best he could; and where it was too steep
His father roped him to him for support.
The other two he carried in his arms
And on his back.
And thus, year after year,
He drudged; and his three sons grew to be men.
Then came a time when he might surely ask
For something in return from them; but they,
Three prosperous men in far America,
Had quite forgotten their Norwegian father
And how he used to help them to the school.
He was a man whose vision never saw
Farther than what lay nearest to his hand.
Words which resound in other people's hearts
Were meaningless to him as tinkling bells;
Family, Country—all that's best and brightest—
Was blurred and hidden by a veil of tears.
But never did I know a man so humble.
From that Conscription Day he carried with him
The sense of guilt, which showed as plainly on him
As did the blush of shame upon his cheek
And his four fingers hidden in his pocket.
A breaker of his country's laws? Perhaps!
But there is something that outshines the law
As certainly as Glittertinde's peaks
Stand gleaming in the sun above the clouds.
He was a bad citizen, no doubt;
For Church and State alike, a sterile tree;

But up there on the rocky mountain side,
In the small circle of his hearth and home,
Where his work lay, *there* I say he was great,
Because he was himself. 'Twas only there
The metal he was made of could ring true.
His life was like a melody that's played
On muted strings. — And therefore, peace be with you,
Poor silent warrior, who fought and fell
Waging the little war of peasant's life!
We will not seek to search the heart and reins;
That's not a task for us, but for his Maker.
Still, this I hope—and hope with confidence:
That this man, as he stands before the Throne,
Is not a cripple in the eyes of God!

[*The congregation disperses.* PEER GYNT *remains alone.*

PEER GYNT.

Well, *that's* what I call Christianity!
Nothing in it to make one feel uneasy.
Indeed the theme of the Priest's address—
That we should all strive to be ourselves—
Is really extremely edifying. [*Looks into the grave.*
Was it he, I wonder, who slashed his knuckles
When I was felling trees in the forest?
Who knows? If I were not standing here
By the grave of this congenial spirit,
I might believe that it was myself
That was sleeping there and was listening
In dreams to praises that I deserved.
It's really a beautiful Christian practice
To take a kindly retrospect
Of the whole life of the departed.
I'd readily accept a verdict
From this most worthy priest.—However,
I've still some time left, I expect,
Before the sexton comes and claims me;
And, as the Scripture says: "The best
Is still the best"; and, in like manner:

" Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof ";
And, further: " Do not borrow trouble."—
The Church is the only comforter.
Up till now I have never given
The credit to it that is its due;
But now I know what good it does you
To hear authority proclaim:
" As you have sowed, so must you reap."
We must be ourselves; in everything,
Both great and small, we must look after
Ourselves and what concerns ourselves.
Though Fortune fail us we shall win
Respect, if our careers have been
Shaped in accordance with this doctrine.—
And now for home! What though the way
Be steep and narrow—what though Fortune
Be still malicious—old Peer Gynt
Will go his own way, and remain,
As always: poor but virtuous. [*Goes.*

Scene IV

(Scene.—*A hillside showing the dried-up bed of a stream, by which stands a ruined mill. The ground is torn up, and everything is in a ruinous state. Outside the mill an auction is taking place; there is a large and noisy gathering of people, and drinking is going on.* Peer Gynt *is sitting on a heap of rubbish near the mill.*)

Peer Gynt.

Backward or forward, it's just as far;
Out or in, the way's as narrow.
Time destroys and the stream cuts through.
" Round about," said the Boyg; and we needs must, here.

A Man in Mourning.[1]

Now there's nothing left but the rubbish.
[*Looks at* Peer Gynt.
Strangers, too? God save you, sir!

Peer Gynt.

Well met! This is a merry scene;
Is it a christening, or a wedding?

Man in Mourning.

I should rather say a house-warming;
The bride, poor thing, is food for worms.

Peer Gynt.

And worms are fighting for rags and scraps.

Man in Mourning.

It's a finished story, and this is the end.

Peer Gynt.

Every story ends the same;
I've known them all since I was a boy.

A Young Boy (*holding a casting-ladle*).

Look what a fine thing I have bought!
Peer Gynt used to mould buttons with this.

Another.

I got a fine purse for a farthing!

A Third.

A pedlar's pack for twopence halfpenny!

Peer Gynt.

Peer Gynt? Who was he?

Man in Mourning.

I only know
He was brother-in-law to the bridegroom, Death,
And also to the blacksmith Aslak.

[1] The Man in Mourning is Aslak, who apparently has married Ingrid and is now in mourning for her death.

A Man in Grey.[1]
You're forgetting me; you must be drunk!

Man in Mourning.
You're forgetting the loft-door at Hægstad.

Man in Grey.
So I was; but you were never dainty.

Man in Mourning.
If only she doesn't play Death a trick——

Man in Grey.
Come on! Have a drink with your relation!

Man in Mourning.
Relation be damned! Your drunken fancies——

Man in Grey.
Oh, nonsense! Blood is thicker than that;
At least we're both Peer Gynt's relations.
[*They go off together.*

Peer Gynt (*aside*).
I'm meeting old friends.

A Boy (*calling after the* Man in Mourning).
My poor dead mother
Will come after you, Aslak, if you get drinking.

Peer Gynt (*getting up*).
The Agriculturalists are wrong;
It doesn't smell better the deeper you dig.

A Boy (*with a bearskin*).
Here's the Dovrë-Cat!—or at least his skin!
It was he chased the Troll on Christmas Eve.

Another (*with a pair of reindeer-horns*).
Here's the fine buck on which Peer Gynt
Rode right along the ridge of Gendin.

[1] The Man in Grey is Mads Moen.

A Third
(*with a hammer, calls to the* Man in Mourning).
Hi! Aslak! Do you know this hammer?
Was it this you used when the Devil escaped?

A Fourth (*showing his empty hands*).
Mads Moen, here's the invisible cloak
In which Peer Gynt and Ingrid vanished.

Peer Gynt.
Some brandy, boys! I'm feeling old;
I'll hold an auction of all my rubbish.

A Boy.
What have you got to sell?

Peer Gynt.
A castle;
It's up at Rondë, and solidly built.

Boy.
I bid one button!

Peer Gynt.
A drink with it, then;
It's a sin and a shame to offer less.

Another Boy.
He's a merry old chap!
[*The crowd gathers round* Peer Gynt.

Peer Gynt.
Granë, my horse!—
Who bids?

One of the Crowd.
Where is he?

Peer Gynt.
Away in the West!
Near the sunset, boys! He can trot as fast
As Peer Gynt could make up his lies.

VOICES.

What more have you?

PEER GYNT.

Both gold and rubbish!
I bought them at a loss, and now
I'll sell them at a sacrifice.

A BOY.

Put them up!

PEER GYNT.

A vision of a prayer-book!
You may have it for a hook and eye.

BOY.

Deuce take your visions!

PEER GYNT.

Then—my Empire!
I throw it to you; you may scramble for it!

BOY.

Does a crown go with it?

PEER GYNT.

A lovely crown
Of straw, and it will fit the first
That puts it on.—Here's something more!
An empty egg! Grey hair of a madman!
The Prophet's beard!—You may have them all,
If you'll only show me on the hillside
A signpost marked: "This is the way"!

THE MAYOR (*who has come up*).

The way you're going on, my man,
I think will lead you to the lock-up.

PEER GYNT (*with his hat in his hand*).

Very likely. But, tell me, who was Peer Gynt?

THE MAYOR.

Oh, bother—!

PEER GYNT.

Excuse me—I want to know—!

THE MAYOR.

Well,—they say, an incurable romancer.

PEER GYNT.

Romancer?

THE MAYOR.

Yes; romanced about
All sorts of glorious deeds as if
He had done all of them himself.
Excuse me now, my friend, I'm busy——
[*Goes away.*

PEER GYNT.

And where's this wonderful fellow now?

AN ELDERLY MAN.

He went oversea to a foreign land,
And came to grief as one might have expected.
It's many years now since he was hanged.

PEER GYNT.

Hanged? Dear me! I was sure of it;
The late Peer Gynt was himself to the last.
[*Bows.*
Good-bye. I'm much obliged to you all!
[*Takes a few steps, then stops.*
You merry boys and lovely women,
May I tell you a story in return?

VOICES.

Yes, if you know one!

PEER GYNT.

Certainly.

[*Comes back to them. His face takes on an altered expression.*

I was in San Francisco, gold-digging,
And the whole town was full of freaks;
One played the fiddle with his toes,
One danced fandangos on his knees,
A third, I heard, kept making verses
While holes were bored right through his skull.
To this freak-show the Devil came,
To try his luck like so many others.
His line was this: he could imitate
The grunting of a pig exactly.
His personality attracted
Although he was not recognized.
The house was full, and on tenterhooks
Of expectation. In he strode,
Dressed in a cape with flowing wings;
Man muss sich drappieren, as the Germans say.
But no one knew that in his cape
He had a little pig concealed.
And now he started his performance.
The devil pinched; the pig gave tongue.
The whole was a fantasia
On a pig's life, from birth to slaughter,
Ending up with a shriek like that
Which follows on the slaughterer's stroke;
With which, the artist bowed and went.—
Then there arose a keen discussion
Among the experts in the audience.
The noises were both praised and censured;
Some found the tone of them too thin,
Others declared the dying shriek
Was far too studied; but they all
Were of the same mind on one point:
That the performance was, *qua* grunt,
Exceedingly exaggerated.
You see, that's what the Devil got,

Because he'd made the sad mistake
Of reckoning without his public.
[*Bows and goes away. An uneasy silence falls on the crowd.*

Scene V

(Scene.—*A clearing in a great forest, on the Eve of Pentecost. In the background is seen a hut, with a pair of reindeer-horns over the door.* Peer Gynt *is on all-fours on the ground, grubbing up wild onions.*)

Peer Gynt.

This is one standpoint. Where is the next?
One should try all things and choose the best.
I have done that; I've been a Cæsar,
And now I'm behaving like Nebuchadnezzar.
So I might go through Bible history.
This old boy's back to mother earth.
I remember the Book says: "Dust thou art."
The great thing in life is to fill your belly.
Fill it with onions? It matters little;
I'll fit some cunning traps and snares.
There is a brook; I'll not go thirsty;
And all wild things shall do my bidding.
And, suppose I die—which perhaps may happen—
I'll creep beneath a fallen tree;
Like the bear, I'll cover myself with leaves,
And scratch in the bark, in great big letters:
"Here lies Peer Gynt, a decent chap,
Who was Emperor of all the Beasts."—
Emperor? [*Laughs to himself.*
You absurd old humbug!
You're not an emperor, you're an onion!
Now, my dear Peer, I'm going to peel you,
However little you may enjoy it.
[*Takes an onion and peels it, layer by layer.*
There's the untidy outer husk;
That's the shipwrecked man on the wreck of the boat;
Next layer's the Passenger, thin and skinny—

Still smacking of Peer Gynt a little.
Next we come to the gold-digger self;
The pith of it's gone—someone's seen to that.
This layer with a hardened edge
Is the fur-hunter of Hudson's Bay.
The next one's like a crown. No, thank you!
We'll throw it away without further question.
Here's the Antiquarian, short and sturdy;
And here is the Prophet, fresh and juicy;
He stinks, as the saying goes, of lies
Enough to bring water to your eyes.
This layer, effeminately curled,
Is the man who lived a life of pleasure.
The next looks sickly. It's streaked with black.
Black may mean missionaries or negroes.
[*Pulls off several layers together.*
There's a most surprising lot of layers!
Are we never coming to the kernel?
[*Pulls all that is left to pieces.*
There isn't one! To the innermost bit
It's nothing but layers, smaller and smaller.
Nature's a joker! [*Throws the bits away from him.*
Deuce take all thinking!
If you begin that, you may miss your footing.
Well, anyway *I* don't run that risk
As long as I'm down on all-fours here.
[*Scratches the back of his head.*
Life's an uncommonly odd contraption;
It plays an underhand game with us;
If you try to catch hold of it, it eludes you,
And you get what you didn't expect—or nothing.
[*Goes closer to the hut, looks at it, and starts.*
That hut? In the forest—! Eh? [*Rubs his eyes.*
I'm certain
I must have seen that hut before.
The reindeer-horns there, over the door—!
A mermaid carved on the end of the gable—!
That's a lie! No mermaid—just logs and nails—
And the bolt that should keep out plaguy thoughts—!
[SOLVEIG'S *voice is heard from the hut.*

SOLVEIG (*singing*).

Now all is ready for Pentecost.
Dear lad far away, are you coming near?
If your burden's heavy, then rest awhile;
I shall wait, because I promised you, dear.

[PEER GYNT *rises to his feet, deathly pale and quiet.*

PEER GYNT.

One who remembered—and one who forgot;
One who has kept what the other has lost.
Life's serious, not a foolish jest!
Ah, misery! *Here* my Empire lay!

[*Runs into the wood.*

SCENE VI

(SCENE.—*A moor with firs, at night. A forest fire has laid it waste. Charred tree-trunks for miles around. Patches of white mist are lying here and there over the ground.* PEER GYNT *comes running over the moor.*)

PEER GYNT.

Ashes, mists and dust-clouds flying—
Fine material to build with!
Stench and rottenness within them;
All a whited sepulchre.
Fancies, dreams and still-born wisdom
For a base, while lies shall serve
For a staircase for the building
Of a lofty pyramid.
Flight from everything that's worthy;
No repentance—only terror;
These shall cap a building labelled:
" Petrus Gyntus Cæsar fecit "! [*Listens.*
What is that sound like children's weeping?—
Weeping that is half a song?
What are these that I see rolling
At my feet, like balls of thread?
[*Kicks his feet about.*
Get away! You block the path up!

THE THREADBALLS[1] (*on the ground*).
We are thoughts;
You should have thought us;
Little feet, to life
You should have brought us!

PEER GYNT (*going round them*).
I've only brought *one* thought to life,—
And it was wry and bandy-legged!

THE THREADBALLS.
We should have risen
With glorious sound;
But here like threadballs
We are earth-bound.

PEER GYNT (*stumbling*).
Threadballs! You infernal rascals!
Are you tripping up your father? [*Runs away.*

WITHERED LEAVES (*flying before the wind*).
We are a watchword;
You should have used us!
Life, by your sloth,
Has been refused us.
By worms we're eaten
All up and down;
No fruit will have us
For spreading crown.

PEER GYNT.
Still, you have not been born for nothing;
Lie still, and you will serve for manure.

A SIGHING IN THE AIR.
We are songs;
You should have sung us!
In the depths of your heart

[1] The idea of Trolls incorporated in threadballs is frequently met with in Scandinavian folklore.

Despair has wrung us!
We lay and waited;
You called us not.
May your throat and voice
With poison rot!

PEER GYNT.

Poison yourselves, you silly doggerel!
Had I any time for verse and twaddle?
[*Goes to one side.*

DEWDROPS (*dropping from the branches*).

We are tears
Which were never shed.
The cutting ice
Which all hearts dread
We could have melted;
But now its dart
Is frozen into
A stubborn heart.
The wound is closed;
Our power is lost.

PEER GYNT.

Thanks!—I wept at Rondesvalen,
And got a thrashing on the backside!

BROKEN STRAWS.

We are deeds
You have left undone;
Strangled by doubt,
Spoiled ere begun.
At the Judgment Day
We shall be there
To tell our tale;
How will you fare?

PEER GYNT.

Rubbish! You can't condemn a man
For actions that he *hasn't* done!

Aase's Voice (*from afar off*).

Fie, what a driver!
Ugh! You've upset me
Into a snowdrift,
Muddied and wet me.
Peer, where's the Castle?
You've driven madly;
The whip in your hand
The Devil's used badly!

Peer Gynt.

I'd best be off while I am able.
If I have to bear the burden
Of the Devil's sins, I'll sink
Into the ground. I find my own
Quite a heavy enough load. [*Runs off.*

Scene VII

(Scene.—*Another part of the moor.*)

Peer Gynt (*singing*).

A sexton! a sexton! Where are you all?
Open your bleating mouths and sing!
We've bands of crape tied round our hats,
And plenty of corpses for burying!

[*The* Button Moulder, *carrying his box of tools and a big casting-ladle, comes in by a side path.*

Button Moulder.

Well met, gaffer!

Peer Gynt.

Good evening, my friend!

Button Moulder.

You seem in a hurry. Where are you going?

PEER GYNT.

To a funeral.

BUTTON MOULDER.

Really? My sight's not good—
Excuse me—is your name by any chance Peer?

PEER GYNT.

Peer Gynt's my name.

BUTTON MOULDER.

What a piece of luck!
It was just Peer Gynt I was looking for.

PEER GYNT.

Were you? What for?

BUTTON MOULDER.

Well, as you see,
I am a button moulder; and you
Must be popped into my Casting-ladle.

PEER GYNT.

What for?

BUTTON MOULDER.

So as to be melted down.

PEER GYNT.

Melted?

BUTTON MOULDER.

Yes; it's clean and it's empty.
Your grave is dug and your coffin ordered;
Your body will make fine food for worms;
But the Master's orders bid me fetch
Your soul at once.

PEER GYNT.

Impossible!
Like this?—without the slightest warning?

BUTTON MOULDER.

Alike for funerals and confinements
The custom is to choose the day
Without giving the slightest warning
To the chief guest of the occasion.

PEER GYNT.

Quite so. My head is going round!
You are—?

BUTTON MOULDER.

You heard; a button moulder.

PEER GYNT.

I understand! A favourite child
Is called by lots of names.—Well, Peer,
So *that's* to be the end of your journey!—
Still, it's a scurvy trick to play me.
I deserved something a little kinder.
I'm not so bad as perhaps you think;
I've done some little good in the world.
At worst I might be called a bungler,
But certainly not an out-and-out sinner.

BUTTON MOULDER.

But that is just the point, my man.
In the highest sense you're not a sinner;
So you escape the pangs of torment
And come into the Casting-ladle.

PEER GYNT.

Oh, call it what you like—a ladle
Or the bottomless pit—it's just the same!
Ginger is always hot in the mouth,
Whatever you may be pleased to call it.
Satan, away!

BUTTON MOULDER.

You are not so rude
As to think that I've a cloven hoof?

PEER GYNT.

Cloven hoof or fox's claws—
Whichever you like. So now pack off!
Mind your own business, and be off!

BUTTON MOULDER.

My friend, you're under a great delusion.
We're both in a hurry; so, to save time,
I'll try to explain the matter to you.
You are, as you yourself have said,
Nothing great in the way of a sinner—
Scarcely a middling one, perhaps——

PEER GYNT.

Now you are talking reasonably.

BUTTON MOULDER.

Wait a bit!—I think it would be going
Too far to call you virtuous——

PEER GYNT.

I certainly don't lay claim to that.

BUTTON MOULDER.

Well, then, say, something betwixt and between.
Sinners in the true grand style
Are seldom met with nowadays;
That style of sin needs power of mind—
It's something more than dabbling in mud.

PEER GYNT.

That's perfectly true; one should go at it
With something of a Berserk's fury.

BUTTON MOULDER.

You, on the contrary, my friend,
Took sinning lightly.

PEER GYNT.

Just, my friend,
A little mud-splashed, so to speak.

BUTTON MOULDER.

Now we're agreed. The bottomless pit
Is not for you who played with mud.

PEER GYNT.

Consequently, my friend, I take it
That I may have your leave to go
Just as I came?

BUTTON MOULDER.

Oh no, my friend—
Consequently you'll be melted down.

PEER GYNT.

What's this new game that you've invented
While I have been abroad?

BUTTON MOULDER.

The practice
Is just as old as the Creation,
And was invented for the purpose
Of keeping things up to the standard.
You know in metal work, for instance,
It sometimes happens that a casting
Turns out a failure, absolutely—
Buttons are turned out without loops.
What would you do in such a case?

PEER GYNT.

I'd throw the trash away.

BUTTON MOULDER.

Exactly.
Your father had the reputation
Of reckless wastefulness as long
As he had anything to waste.
The Master, on the other hand,
Is economical, you see,
And therefore is a man of substance.
He never throws away as useless

A single thing that may be dealt with
As raw material.—Now, *you*
Were meant to be a gleaming button
On the World's waistcoat, but your loop
Was missing; so you've got to go
Into the scrap-heap, to be merged
Into the mass.

PEER GYNT.

But do you mean
That I've got to be melted down
With any Tom and Dick and Harry
And moulded fresh?

BUTTON MOULDER.

That's what I mean.
That's what we've done to not a few,
It's what they do at the mint with money
When the coin is too much worn with use.

PEER GYNT.

But it's simply disgusting niggardliness!
My dear friend, won't you let me go?
A loopless button—a smooth-worn coin—
What are they to a man of your master's substance?

BUTTON MOULDER.

The fact of your having a soul's enough
To give you a certain intrinsic value.

PEER GYNT.

No, I say! No! With tooth and nail
I'll fight against it! I'd rather, far,
Put up with anything than that!

BUTTON MOULDER.

But what do you mean by "anything"?
You must be reasonable, you know;
You're not the sort that goes to Heaven——

PEER GYNT.

I'm humble; I don't aim so high
As that; but I'm not going to lose
A single jot of what's myself.
Let me be sentenced in ancient fashion;
Send me to Him with the Cloven Hoof
For a certain time—say, a hundred years,
If the sentence must be a very severe one.
That's a thing I daresay one might put up with;
The torture would then be only moral,
And perhaps, after all, not so very tremendous.
It would be a transition, so to speak,
As the fox said.[1] If you wait, there comes
Deliverance and you may get back;
Meanwhile you hope for better days.
But the other idea—to be swallowed up
Like a speck in a mass of strange material—
This ladle business—losing all
The attributes that make a Gynt—
That fills my inmost soul with horror!

BUTTON MOULDER.

But, my dear Peer, there is no need
For you to make so great a fuss
About so small a thing; because
You never yet have been yourself.
What difference can it make to you
If, when you die, you disappear?

PEER GYNT.

I've never been myself! Haha!
You almost make me laugh. Peer Gynt
Anything but himself!—No, no,
Friend Button Moulder, you are wrong;
You're judging blindly. If you searched
My inmost being, you would find
I'm Peer right through, and nothing else.

[1] "As the fox said when they skinned him." A Norwegian proverb.

BUTTON MOULDER.

Impossible. Here are my orders.
See, they say: " You will fetch Peer Gynt.
He has defied his destiny.
He is a failure, and must go
Straight into the Casting-ladle."

PEER GYNT.

What nonsense! It must surely mean
Some other Gynt. Are you quite sure
That it says Peer?—not John, or Rasmus?

BUTTON MOULDER.

I melted them down long ago.
Now, come along and don't waste time.

PEER GYNT.

No, that I won't! Suppose to-morrow
You found that it meant someone else?
That would be pleasant! My good man,
You must be careful, and remember
What a responsibility——

BUTTON MOULDER.

I've got my orders to protect me.

PEER GYNT.

Give me a little respite, then!

BUTTON MOULDER.

What for?

PEER GYNT.

I will find means to prove
That, all my life, I've been myself;
That is, of course, the point at issue.

BUTTON MOULDER.

Prove it? But how?

PEER GYNT.

With witnesses
And testimonials.

BUTTON MOULDER.

I fear
That you won't satisfy the Master.

PEER GYNT.

I'm quite sure that I shall! Besides,
We'll talk about that when the time comes.
Dear man, just let me have myself
On loan for quite a little while.
I will come back to you. We men
Are not born more than once, you know,
And naturally we make a fight
To keep the self with which we came
Into the world.—Are we agreed?

BUTTON MOULDER.

So be it. But, remember this:
At the next crossroads we shall meet.

[PEER GYNT *runs off.*

SCENE VIII

(SCENE.—*Another part of the moor.*)

PEER GYNT (*running in*).

Time is money, as people say.
If I only knew where the crossroads are—
It may be near, or it may be far.
The ground seems to burn my feet like fire.
A witness! A witness! Where shall I find one?
It's next to impossible, here in the forest.
The world's a bungle! It's managed wrong,

If it's necessary for a man to prove
His rights that are clear as the noonday sun!
[*A bent* OLD MAN, *with a staff in his hand and a bag on his back, hobbles up to* PEER GYNT.

OLD MAN.
Kind sir, give a homeless old man a penny!

PEER GYNT.
I'm sorry—I have no change about me——

OLD MAN.
Prince Peer! Can it be that we meet at last?

PEER GYNT.
Why, who—?

OLD MAN.
He's forgotten the old man at Rondë!

PEER GYNT.
You surely are never—?

OLD MAN.
The King of the Dovrë.

PEER GYNT.
The Troll King? Really? The Troll King?—Answer!

OLD MAN.
I'm he, but in different circumstances.

PEER GYNT.
Ruined?

OLD MAN.
Aye, robbed of everything;
A tramp, and as hungry as a wolf.

PEER GYNT.
Hurrah! Such witnesses as this
Don't grow on every tree!

OLD MAN.

Your Highness
Has grown grey too since last we met.

PEER GYNT.

Worry and age, dear father-in-law.
Well, let's forget our private affairs;
And, above all, our family squabbles.
I was a foolish youth——

OLD MAN.

Yes, yes;
You were young, and youth must have its fling.
And it's lucky for you that you jilted your bride;
You've escaped a lot of shame and bother,
For afterwards she went clean to the bad——

PEER GYNT.

Dear me!

OLD MAN.

Now she may look after herself.
Just think—she and Trond have gone off together.

PEER GYNT.

What Trond?

OLD MAN.

Of the Valfjeld.

PEER GYNT.

He? Aha,
I robbed him of the cowherd girls.

OLD MAN.

But my grandson's grown a fine big fellow
And has bouncing babies all over the country.

PEER GYNT.

Now, my dear man, I must cut you short;
I am full of quite a different matter.—

I'm in rather a difficult position,
And have to get a certificate
Or a testimonial from someone;
And I think you'll be the very person.
I can always raise the wind enough
To stand you a drink——

OLD MAN.

Oh! Can I really
Be of assistance to Your Highness?
Perhaps, if that is so, you'll give me
A character in return?

PEER GYNT.

With pleasure.
I'm a little short of ready money
And have to be careful in every way.—
Now, listen to me. Of course you remember
How I came that night to woo your daughter——

OLD MAN.

Of course, Your Highness!

PEER GYNT.

Oh, drop the title!
Well, you wanted to do me violence—
To spoil my sight by cutting my eyeball,
And turn Peer Gynt into a Troll.
What did I do? I strongly objected;
Swore I would stand on my own feet;
Gave up my love, and power and honours,
Simply and solely to be myself.
I want you to swear to that in court——

OLD MAN.

I can't do that!

PEER GYNT.

What's that you're saying?

OLD MAN.

You'll surely not force me to swear a lie?
Remember that you put on Troll breeches,
And tasted our mead——

PEER GYNT.

Yes, you tempted me;
But I resolutely made up my mind
That I would not give in. And *that's* the way
A man shows what he's worth. A song
Depends on its concluding verse.

OLD MAN.

But the conclusion, Peer, was just
The opposite of what you think.

PEER GYNT.

What do you mean?

OLD MAN.

You took away
My motto graven on your heart.

PEER GYNT.

What motto?

OLD MAN.

That compelling word—

PEER GYNT.

Word—?

OLD MAN.

—that distinguishes a Troll
From Mankind: "Troll, to thyself be——
Enough"!

PEER GYNT (*with a shriek*).
Enough!

OLD MAN.

And, ever since,
With all the energy you have,
You've lived according to that motto.

PEER GYNT.

I? I? Peer Gynt?

OLD MAN (*weeping*).

You're most ungrateful.
You've lived like a Troll, but have kept it secret.
The word I taught has enabled you
To move in the world like a well-to-do man;
And now you begin abusing me
And the word to which you owe gratitude.

PEER GYNT.

Enough!—A mere Troll! An egoist!
It must be nonsense—it can't be true!

OLD MAN (*producing a bundle of newspapers*).

Don't you suppose that we have our papers?
Wait; I will show you in black and white
How the *Bloksberg Post* has sung your praises;
The *Heklefjeld News* has done the same
Ever since the winter you went abroad.
Will you read them, Peer? I'll be pleased to let you.
Here's an article signed: "Stallion's Hoof."
Here's one: "On the National Spirit of Trolldom";
The writer shows how true it is
That it doesn't depend upon horns or tails,
But on having the spirit of Trollhood in one.
"Our 'Enough,'" he concludes, "is what gives the stamp
Of Troll to Man"; and he mentions you
As a striking instance.

PEER GYNT.

I—a Troll?

OLD MAN.

It seems quite clear.

PEER GYNT.

Then I might have stayed
Where I was, and lived in peace and comfort
At Rondë! I might have saved shoe leather,
And spared myself much toil and trouble!
Peer Gynt—a Troll! It's a pack of lies!
Good-bye! Here's a penny to buy tobacco.

OLD MAN.

But, dear Prince Peer—!

PEER GYNT.

Oh, drop this nonsense!
You're mad, or else you're in your dotage.
Go to a hospital.

OLD MAN.

Aye, it's that
I'm looking for. But, as I told you,
My grandson's very influential
In all this part, and tells the people
I don't exist except in legends.
The saying goes that one's relations
Are always the worst; and now, alas,
I feel the truth of it. It's sad
To be looked on as being merely
A legendary personage——

PEER GYNT.

Dear man, you're not the only one
To suffer that mishap.

OLD MAN.

And then,
We Trolls have nothing in the way

Of Charities or Savings Banks
Or Alms-boxes; such institutions
Would never be acceptable
At Rondë.

PEER GYNT.

No; and there you see
The work of your confounded motto—
Your fine "To thyself be *enough*"!

OLD MAN.

Your Highness has no need to grumble.
And if, in some way or another—?

PEER GYNT.

You're on the wrong scent altogether;
I'm at the end of my resources.

OLD MAN.

Impossible! Your Highness ruined?

PEER GYNT.

Cleared out. Even my princely self
Is now in pawn. And that's your fault,
You cursed Trolls! It only shows
What comes of evil company.

OLD MAN.

So there's another of my hopes
Destroyed!—Good-bye! I'd better try
And beg my way down to the town——

PEER GYNT.

And when you're there, what will you do?

OLD MAN.

I'll try and go upon the stage.
They're advertising for National Types
In the papers.

PEER GYNT.

Well, good luck to you!—
And give my kind regards to them!
If I can only free myself,
I'll go the same way too. I'll write
A farce that shall be both profound
And entertaining, and its title
Shall be: "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi."

[*Runs off along the path, leaving the* OLD MAN *calling after him.*

SCENE IX

(SCENE.—*At crossroads.*)

PEER GYNT.

This is the tightest corner, Peer,
You've ever been in. The Trolls' "Enough"
Has done for you. Your ship's a wreck;
You must cling to the wreckage—anything—
To avoid the general rubbish heap.

BUTTON MOULDER (*at the parting of the ways*).

Well, Peer Gynt? And your witnesses?

PEER GYNT.

What, crossroads here? This is quick work.

BUTTON MOULDER.

I can read your face as easily
As I can a book, and know your thoughts.

PEER GYNT.

I'm tired from running—one goes astray——

BUTTON MOULDER.

Yes; and, besides, what does it lead to?

PEER GYNT.

True enough; in the woods, in this failing light——

BUTTON MOULDER.

There's an old man trudging along; shall we call him?

PEER GYNT.

No, let him alone; he's a drunken scamp.

BUTTON MOULDER.

But perhaps he could——

PEER GYNT.

Hush! No—don't call him!

BUTTON MOULDER.

Is that the way of it?

PEER GYNT.

Just one question:
What is it really to "be one's self"?

BUTTON MOULDER.

That's a strange question from a man
Who just now——

PEER GYNT.

Tell me what I asked you.

BUTTON MOULDER.

To be one's self is to slay one's self.[1]
But as perhaps that explanation
Is thrown away on you, let's say:
To follow out, in everything,
What the Master's intention was.

[1] *i.e.*, to kill the base part of one's nature that one's better self may live.

PEER GYNT.

But suppose a man was never told
What the Master's intention was?

BUTTON MOULDER.

Insight should tell him.

PEER GYNT.

But our insight
So often is at fault, and then
We're thrown out of our stride completely.

BUTTON MOULDER.

Quite so, Peer Gynt. And lack of insight
Gives to our friend with the Cloven Hoof
His strongest weapon, let me tell you.

PEER GYNT.

It's all an extremely subtle problem.—
But, listen; I give up my claim
To have been myself; it very likely
Would be too difficult to prove it.
I'll not attempt to fight the point.
But, as I was wandering all alone
Over the moor just now, I felt
A sudden prick from the spur of conscience.
I said to myself: "You are a sinner——"

BUTTON MOULDER.

Oh, now you're back to where you started——

PEER GYNT.

No, not at all; I mean a *great* one,—
Not only in deed, but in thought and word.
I lived a dreadful life abroad——

BUTTON MOULDER.

May be; but have you anything
To show to prove it?

PEER GYNT.

Give me time;
I'll find a priest, and get it all
In writing, properly attested.

BUTTON MOULDER.

If you can do that, it will clear things up,
And you will be spared the Casting-ladle.
But my orders, Peer——

PEER GYNT.

They're on very old paper;
It certainly dates from a long time back,
When the life I lived was loose and foolish.
I posed as a Prophet and Fatalist.—
Well, may I try?

BUTTON MOULDER.

But——

PEER GYNT.

Be obliging!
I'm sure you have no great press of business.
It's excellent air in this part of the country;
They say it adds years to the people's lives.
The parson at Justedal used to say:
" It is seldom that anyone dies in this valley."

BUTTON MOULDER.

As far as the next crossroads—no farther.

PEER GYNT.

I must find a parson, if I have
To go through fire and water to get him!

Scene X

(Scene.—*A heathery slope. A winding path leads up to the hills.*)

Peer Gynt.

You never can tell what will come in useful,
As Esben[1] said of the magpie's wing.
Who would have thought that one's sinfulness
Would, in the end, prove one's salvation?
The whole affair is a ticklish business,
For it's out of the frying-pan into the fire;
But still there's a saying that's very true—
Namely, that while there's life there's hope.
[*A* Thin Person, *dressed in a priest's cassock which is well tucked up, and carrying a bird-catcher's net over his shoulder, comes running down the hill.*
Who's that with the bird-net? It's a parson!
Hurrah! I am really in luck to-day!—
Good afternoon, sir! The path is rough——

Thin Person.

It is; but what would not one put up with
To win a soul?

Peer Gynt.

Oh, then there's someone
Who's bound for heaven?

Thin Person.

Not at all;
I hope he's bound for another place.

[1] Esben Askeladd, in a folk-tale, where his finding of a dead magpie led to his winning the hand of the fair Princess.

PEER GYNT.

May I walk with you a little way?

THIN PERSON.

By all means; I'm glad of company.

PEER GYNT.

Something is on my mind——

THIN PERSON.

Speak on!

PEER GYNT.

You have the look of an honest man.
I have always kept my country's laws
And have never been put under lock and key;
Still, a man misses his footing sometimes
And stumbles——

THIN PERSON.

That's so, with the best of us.

PEER GYNT.

These trifles, you know——

THIN PERSON.

Only trifles?

PEER GYNT.

Yes;
I have never gone in for wholesale sinning.

THIN PERSON.

Then, my dear man, don't bother me.
I'm not the man you seem to think.
I see you're looking at my fingers;
What do you think of them?

PEER GYNT.

Your nails
Seem most remarkably developed.

THIN PERSON.

And now you're glancing at my feet?

PEER GYNT (*pointing*).

Is that hoof [1] natural?

THIN PERSON.

Of course.

PEER GYNT (*lifting his hat*).

I would have sworn you were a parson.
And so I have the honour to meet—?
What luck! If the front door is open,
One doesn't use the servants' entrance;
If one should meet the King himself,
One need not seek approach through lackeys.

THIN PERSON.

Shake hands! You seem unprejudiced.
My dear sir, what can I do to serve you?
You must not ask me for wealth or power;
I haven't such a thing to give you,
However willing I might be.
You wouldn't believe how bad things are
With us just now; nothing goes right;
Souls are so scarce—just now and then
A single one——

PEER GYNT.

Have people, then,
Improved so wonderfully?

[1] In Scandinavian folklore the Devil is traditionally represented with a horse's hoof for a right foot.

THIN PERSON.

No,
Just the reverse,—deteriorated
Shamefully; the most of them
End in the Casting-ladle.

PEER GYNT.

Ah!
I've heard a little about that;
It really was on that account
That I approached you.

THIN PERSON.

Speak quite freely!

PEER GYNT.

Well, if it's not too much to ask,
I'm very anxious to secure——

THIN PERSON.

A snug retreat, eh?

PEER GYNT.

You have guessed
What I would say before I said it.
You say you're not doing much business,
And so perhaps my small suggestion
May not be irksome——

THIN PERSON.

But, my friend——

PEER GYNT.

I do not ask for much. Of course
I shouldn't look for any wages,
But only as far as possible
To be treated as one of the family.

THIN PERSON.

A nice warm room?

PEER GYNT.

But not too warm.
And, preferably, I should like
An easy access, in and out,
So that I could retrace my steps
If opportunity should offer
For something better.

THIN PERSON.

My dear friend,
I really am extremely sorry,
But you can't think how very often
Exactly similar requests
Are made to me by people leaving
The scene of all their earthly labours.

PEER GYNT.

But when I call to mind my conduct
In days gone by, it seems to me
I am just suited for admittance——

THIN PERSON.

But they were trifles——

PEER GYNT.

In a sense;
Still, now that I remember it,
I did some trade in negro slaves——

THIN PERSON.

I have had folk who carried on
A trade in minds and wills, but still
Did it half-heartedly,—and they
Didn't get in.

PEER GYNT.

Well—I've exported
Idols of Buddha out to China.

THIN PERSON.

Rubbish! We only laugh at those.
I have known folk disseminating
Uglier idols, far—in sermons,
In art and literature—and yet
Not getting in.

PEER GYNT.

Yes, but—look here!
I've passed myself off as a Prophet!

THIN PERSON.

Abroad? That's nothing! Such escapades
End mostly in the Casting-ladle.
If you've no stronger claim than that,
I can't admit you, however much
I'd like to do it.

PEER GYNT.

Well, but—listen!
I had been shipwrecked, and was clinging
Fast to a boat that had been capsized.
" A drowning man clings to a straw,"
The saying goes; but there's another:
" Everyone for himself ";—and so
The fact that the ship's cook was drowned
Was certainly half due to me.

THIN PERSON.

It would have been more to the point
If you had been responsible
For stealing half a cook-maid's virtue.

Begging your pardon, what's the good
Of all this talk of half a sin?
Who do you think, in these hard times,
Is going to waste expensive fuel
On worthless rubbish such as that?
Now, don't be angry; it's your sins
And not yourself I'm sneering at.
Excuse my speaking out so plainly.
Be wise, my friend, and give it up;
Resign yourself to the Casting-ladle.
Suppose I gave you board and lodging,
What would you gain by that? Consider—
You are a reasonable man;
Your memory's good, it's very true;
But everything you can recall,
Whether you judge it with your head
Or with your heart, is nothing more
Than what our Swedish friends would call
" Very poor sport." There's nothing in it
That's worth a tear or worth a smile,
Worth boasting or despairing of,
Nothing to make one hot or cold—
Only, perhaps, to make one angry.

PEER GYNT.

You can't tell where the shoe is pinching
Unless you've got it on, you know.

THIN PERSON.

That's true; and—thanks to so-and-so—
I only need one odd one. Still,
I'm glad you mentioned shoes, because
It has reminded me that I
Must push along. I've got to fetch
A joint I hope will prove a fat one.
I haven't any time to spare
To stand here gossiping like this——

PEER GYNT.

And may I ask what sort of brew
Of sin this fellow has concocted?

THIN PERSON.

As far as I can gather, he
Has been persistently himself
By day and night; and that is what
Is at the root of the whole matter.

PEER GYNT.

Himself? Does your domain include
People like *that*?

THIN PERSON.

Just as it happens;
The door is always left ajar.
Remember that there are two ways
A man can be himself; a cloth
Has both a right side and a wrong.
You know they've lately invented in Paris
A method by which they can take a portrait
By means of the sun. They can either make
A picture like the original,
Or else what is called a negative.
The latter reverses the light and shade;
To the casual eye it's far from pretty;
But the likeness is in it, all the same,
And to bring it out is all that is needed.
If in the conduct of its life
A soul has photographed itself
So as to make a negative,
They don't on that account destroy
The plate; they send it on to me.
I take in hand the rest of the process,
And proceed to effect a transformation.
I steam it, dip it, burn it, clean it,
With sulphur and other ingredients,

Till I get the likeness the plate should give,—
That's to say, what is called a positive.
But when, as in your case, it's half rubbed out,
No sulphur or lye is of any use.

PEER GYNT.

So, then, one may come to you like soot
And depart like snow?—May I ask what name
Is on the particular negative
That you're on the point of converting now
Into a positive?

THIN PERSON.

Yes—Peer Gynt.

PEER GYNT.

Peer Gynt? Indeed! Is Peer Gynt himself?

THIN PERSON.

He swears he is.

PEER GYNT.

He's a truthful man.

THIN PERSON.

You know him, perhaps?

PEER GYNT.

Just as one knows
So many people.

THIN PERSON.

I've not much time;
Where did you see him last?

PEER GYNT.

At the Cape.

THIN PERSON.

The Cape of Good Hope?

PEER GYNT.

Yes—but I think
He's just on the point of leaving there.

THIN PERSON.

Then I must start for there at once.
I only hope I'm in time to catch him!
I've always had bad luck at the Cape—
It's full of Missionaries from Stavanger.
[*Goes off southwards.*

PEER GYNT.

The silly creature! He's off at a run;
On a wrong scent, too. He'll be disappointed.
It was quite a pleasure to fool such a donkey.
A nice chap, he, to give himself airs
And come the superior over me!
He has nothing to give himself airs about!
He won't grow fat on his trade, I'll warrant;
He'll lose his job if he isn't careful.
H'm! *I*'m not so very secure in the saddle;
I am out of the "self"-aristocracy
For good and all, as it seems to me.
[*A shooting-star flashes across the sky. He nods to it.*
Peer Gynt salutes you, Brother Star!
To shine,—to be quenched, and lost in the void—.
[*Pulls himself together apprehensively and plunges deeper into the mist. After a short silence he calls out:*
Is there no one in the universe—

Nor in the abyss, nor yet in heaven—?
[*Retraces his steps, throws his hat on the ground and tears his hair. By degrees he grows calmer.*
So poor, so miserably poor
May a soul return to the darkling mists
And become as nothing. Beautiful earth,
Forgive me for having trodden thee
All to no purpose. Beautiful sun,
Thy glorious rays have shone upon
An empty shell—no one within
To receive warmth and comfort from thee,
The owner never in his house.
Beautiful sun, beautiful earth,
'Twas but for naught you warmed and nourished
My mother. Nature is a spendthrift,
And the Spirit but a greedy miser.
One's life's a heavy price to pay
For being born.—I will go up,
Up to the highest mountain-tops;
I'll see the sun rise once again,
And gaze upon the promised land
Until my eyes are weary. Then
The snow may fall and cover me,
And on my resting-place be written
As epitaph: "The tomb of *No One*"!
And—after that—well, come what may.

CHURCHFOLK (*singing on the road*).
Oh, blessed day when the Gift of Tongues
Descended on earth in rays of fire!
O'er all the world creation sings
The language of the heavenly quire!

PEER GYNT (*crouching down in terror*).
I will not look! There's nothing there
But desert waste.—I am in terror
Of being dead long ere my death.
[*Tries to steal into the thickets, but finds himself standing at crossroads.*

Scene XI

(Scene.—*Crossroads.* Peer Gynt *is confronted by the* Button Moulder.)

Button Moulder.

Good morning, Peer Gynt! Where's your list of sins?

Peer Gynt.

I assure you that I have shouted and whistled
For all I knew!

Button Moulder.

But yet found no one?

Peer Gynt.

Only a travelling photographer.

Button Moulder.

Well, your time is up.

Peer Gynt.

Everything's up.
The owl smells a rat. Do you hear him hooting?

Button Moulder.

That's the matins bell——

Peer Gynt (*pointing*).

What's that, that's shining?

Button Moulder.

Only a light in a house.

PEER GYNT.

That sound
Like wailing?

BUTTON MOULDER.

Only a woman's song.

PEER GYNT.

'Tis there—there I shall find my list
Of sins!

BUTTON MOULDER (*grasping him by the arm*).

Come, set your house in order!

[*They have come out of the wood, and are standing near* SOLVEIG'S *hut. Day is dawning.*

PEER GYNT.

Set my house in order? That's it!—Go!
Be off! Were your ladle as big as a coffin,
I tell you 'twould not hold me and my list!

BUTTON MOULDER.

To the third crossroads, Peer; but *then*—!

[*Moves aside and disappears.*

PEER GYNT (*approaching the hut*).

Backward or forward, it's just as far;
Out or in, the way's as narrow. [*Stops.*
No! Like a wild unceasing cry
I seem to hear a voice that bids me
Go in—go back—back to my home.

[*Takes a few steps, then stops again.*

" Round about," said the Boyg!

[*Hears the sound of singing from the hut.*

No; this time

It's straight ahead in spite of all,
However narrow be the way!

[*Runs towards the hut. At the same time* SOLVEIG *comes to the door, guiding her steps with a stick* (*for she is nearly blind*). *She is dressed for church and carries a prayer-book wrapped up in a handkerchief. She stands still, erect and gentle.*

PEER GYNT (*throwing himself down on the threshold*).

Pronounce the sentence on a sinner!

SOLVEIG.

'Tis he! 'Tis he! Thanks be to God!
[*Gropes for him.*

PEER GYNT.

Tell me how sinfully I have offended!

SOLVEIG.

You have sinned in nothing, my own dear lad!
[*Gropes for him again, and finds him.*

BUTTON MOULDER (*from behind the hut*).

Where is that list of sins, Peer Gynt?

PEER GYNT.

Cry out, cry out my sins aloud!

SOLVEIG (*sitting down beside him*).

You have made my life a beautiful song.
Bless you for having come back to me!
And blest be this morn of Pentecost!

PEER GYNT.

Then I am lost!

SOLVEIG.

There is One who will help.

PEER GYNT (*with a laugh*).

Lost! Unless you can solve a riddle!

SOLVEIG.

What is it?

PEER GYNT.

What is it? You shall hear.
Can you tell me where Peer Gynt has been
Since last we met?

SOLVEIG.

Where he has been?

PEER GYNT.

With the mark of destiny on his brow—
The man that he was when a thought of God's
Created him! Can you tell me that?
If not, I must go to my last home
In the land of shadows.

SOLVEIG (*smiling*).

That riddle's easy.

PEER GYNT.

Tell me, then—where was my real self,
Complete and true—the Peer who bore
The stamp of God upon his brow?

SOLVEIG.

In my faith, in my hope and in my love.

PEER GYNT.

What are you saying? It is a riddle
That you are speaking now. So speaks
A mother of her child.

SOLVEIG.

Ah, yes;
And that is what I am; but He
Who grants a pardon for the sake
Of a mother's prayers, He is his father.

[*A ray of light seems to flash on* PEER GYNT. *He cries out.*

PEER GYNT.

Mother and wife! You stainless woman!
Oh, hide me, hide me in your love!

[*Clings to her and buries his face in her lap. There is a long silence. The sun rises.*

SOLVEIG (*singing softly*).

Sleep, my boy, my dearest boy!
I will rock you to sleep and guard you.

The boy has sat on his mother's lap.
The two have played the livelong day.

The boy has lain on his mother's breast
The livelong day. God bless you, my sweet!

The boy has lain so close to my heart
The livelong day. He is weary now.

Sleep, my boy, my dearest boy!
I will rock you to sleep and guard you.

[*The* BUTTON MOULDER'S *voice is heard from behind the hut.*

BUTTON MOULDER.

At the last crossroads I shall meet you, Peer;
Then we'll see—whether—! I say no more.

SOLVEIG (*singing louder in the sunshine*).

I will rock you to sleep and guard you!
Sleep and dream, my dearest boy!